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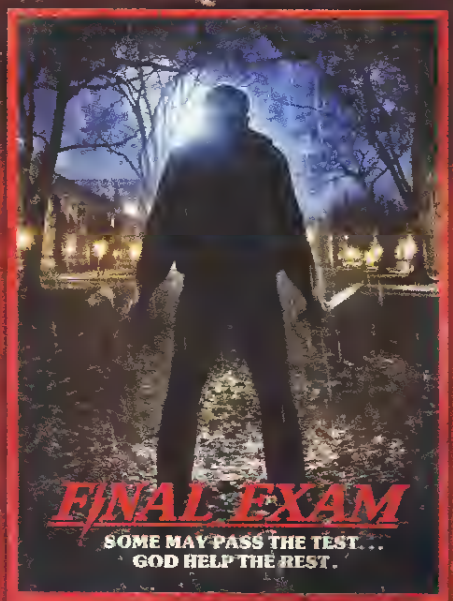
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NOVEMBER 2008 ISSUE #84
YEAR OF THE Vampire



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One of the most unique and haunting vampire films ever made, Sweden's *Let the Right One In* is po[illegible] your blood.
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STAINED SNOW, LOST SOULS

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Note From Underground

I'll be honest, I've never really been a big fan of vampire movies. But when I sat down to write this editorial, ruminating on what I initially thought would be a short list of good ones, I realized there are, in fact, a ton of them: Murnau's *Nosferatu*, *Near Dark*, *Martin*, *Lifeforce*, *Deathdream*, *The Lost Boys*, Coppola's *Dracula*, *Interview with the Vampire*, *The Hunger*, Cronenberg's *Rabid*, *The Last Man on Earth*, *Blacula*, *Cronos*, *Black Sunday*, *Shadow of the Vampire*, *Blade II*, TV's *Dark Shadows*, kinky Eurotic horror such as *Vampyres*, and campy comedic entries such as *Fright Night*, Polanski's *The Fearless Vampire Killers* and *From Dusk Till Dawn*. Hell, I even like Tobe Hooper's *Salem's Lot*.

From that list, *Deathdream*, *Martin*, *Near Dark*, *Lifeforce*, *Cronos* and *Rabid* stand out as the most distinctly inventive. Those bend the rules and offer new ideas within the genre popularized by Bram Stoker. Still, save for Max Schreck's superbly scary turn at the fang and Lon Chaney's razor-toothed fiend in the lost film *London After Midnight*, vampires have always been among my least favourite monsters.

Perhaps it's because, like a lot of people, I tend to associate them with trendy TV shows such as *Buffy* and *Angel*, the bloated gothic melodrama that dominated the British Hammer films of the 1970s (though I do love Christopher Lee in *The Horror of Dracula* and *The Satanic Rites of Dracula*), try-hard arty smut such as Jess Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos* and Jean Rollin's *Living Dead Girl* and, of course, the aristocratic (read: snobby) creatures of Anne Rice's universe. Incidentally, it's too bad Poppy Z. Brite isn't still writing her Southern splatterpunk vampire fiction because I liked her style – fiercely sexual (often gay), violent and unconventional. (I would still love to see someone adapt her book *Exquisite Corpse*.)

Now, it's not that I don't get a girl boner for Hammer's Ingrid Pitt or deviant Eurotic horror or Brad Pitt and Antonio Banderas *almost* making out, it's just that it's not very novel. The vampire as sex symbol has frankly, well, gone a little flaccid. Plus, where's the fear? I guess that's what it all comes down to: I just don't find vampires scary anymore. It's clear to me that this particular monster is starving for fresh blood.

The good news is that it appears the vamps are back with a bloody vengeance – tapping a rich, pulsing vein of current fiction for new life. The teen vampire novel *Twilight*, though aimed at young adults, has grabbed more than just the *Harry Potter* crowd by the throat; HBO's *True Blood* is, so far, the right combination of sex, violence and drama for television and Guillermo del Toro has even signed on to co-write a trilogy of vampire stories for Harper Collins, called *The Strain* (which we all *know* will end up as on screen).

Then there's Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In*.

An entirely new take on the vampire myth (from Sweden, of all places), *Let the Right One In* is a haunting and poetic story about friendship, loyalty and burgeoning adolescent eroticism. Based on a novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist, it's a challenging adult picture that happens to star two children: a bullied twelve-year-old boy (Oskar) and a 250-year-old vampire trapped in a twelve-year-old's body (Eli). They forge a powerful bond fuelled by that which they share in common: loneliness and isolation.

Unlike the slick, action-packed vampire movies of the last few years (i.e. *30 Days of Night* and *Blade: Trinity*), *Let the Right One In* is understated, emotional and beautiful. In other words, it actually has something new to offer the genre. It's no surprise then that it was directed by someone from outside our circle. As you'll see in our cover story interview, Alfredson isn't a horror guy. Rather, he's an art house filmmaker who chooses stories based on his emotional reaction to them. In the case of *Let the Right One In*, he even toned down some of the more perverse elements of the book to access what he felt was at the heart of the story – all while maintaining a magical grip on the genuine horrors within it.

Whatever he did, he did it right; *Let the Right One In* is hands down the best genre film of the year. It is resonating with audiences all over the world and, most importantly, it reminded me of how spellbinding a good bloodsucker tale can be.



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RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE

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DESIGN BY GARY PULLIN

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

WHILE I APPRECIATE Alice Cooper's contribution to the history of shock rock and enjoyed the concept-album career retrospective, I can't help but feel that your interviewer missed a prime opportunity to discuss one of the more sinister multiple personalities of Mr. Vincent Furnier: that of the born-again Christian Republican golf enthusiast. I was shocked to read these facts about him in the article's lead-in, but even more shocked to see that these issues were never followed up in the interview. I realize your focus is horror in entertainment, but you had a chance to pursue some real meaty journalism here, and your readers end up being treated to what is largely just a puff-piece promoting the new album. Perhaps you feel *Rue Morgue* isn't the place to pursue a political or religious discussion, but I ask you: is there anything more horrifying than seeing an iconoclast like Cooper brought to heel by the values of Middle America?

Adam Barraclough – Huntington, West Virginia

SUPERB ARTICLE and interview with Alice Cooper! Last October I set a world record of 31 days straight in-character and costume as "The World's Best Built Alice Cooper Imposter." This was done at Zeezo's costume shop in downtown Colorado Springs. With more special events this season, *Rue Morgue* continues to be the "Beast Read Around" to keep me in the mood.

Dan "DragonTownDan" Howell – Colorado Springs, Colorado

I'M READING the article on Alice Cooper right now and loving it. I'm a huge Alice fan and I've read quite a few articles and books, but this is easily one of the greatest, if only for the two pages about his personalities – why have I never thought of that? Congrats on one of the best issues ever!

Axelle Carolyn – London, England

I'M A BIG FAN of your mag, I haven't missed an issue in five years. The only gripe I have is with reviews of extreme metal releases. Either find somebody who's actually fan of extreme metal to write the reviews or stop reviewing it altogether. Several times I have read reviews of extreme metal albums that are totally ignorant and uneducated, but the new Cannibal Corpse review broke the camel's back. Cannibal Corpse are *not* the godfathers of goregrind. Cannibal Corpse are not even goregrind. Cannibal Corpse are death metal, always have been. As a matter of fact, you guys covered the godfathers of goregrind a few issues back when you reviewed Impetigo! WTF? Any true fan of extreme metal is going to know the difference between bands like Cannibal Corpse, Deicide and Six Feet Under and bands like Impetigo, Rompeprop and Cock and Ball Torture – there's a fuckin' *huge* difference! When I read shit like that it's a real bummer, especially considering how professional the rest of your mag is.

Josh Jetty – address withheld

MY HUSBAND AND I drove all the way from Albany, New York for the Festival of Fear. It was amazing! The Q&A with Dr. Burns was astounding, but what stood out the most was the interview with Sid Haig, who was so moved that he was crying when he was talking about his grandmother coming over from Armenia and how tough it was. Way to go, Lance, on bringing that out of him. I cried all the way home! See you all next year.

Beatrice and John West – Albany, New York

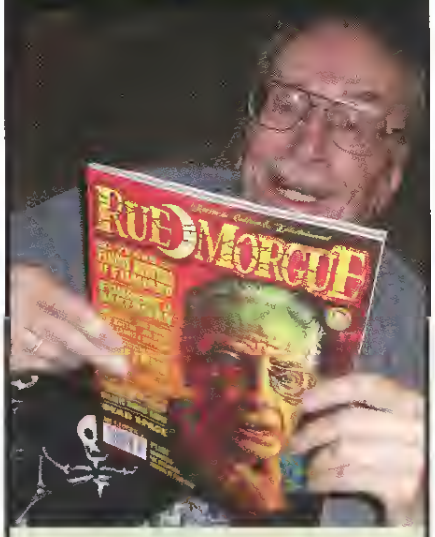
I READ an article the other day about *Quarantine* and found out it is yet another American remake. That would have been fine if I didn't find out that the original *([REC])* has barely hit theatres in its home country. Remakes of older movies is one thing but this is practically theft. The directors even say they kept most of what made it scary, so where is the originality? Is it that Hollywood actually can't come up with any original ideas anymore? Do they not want to spend money on something that they are afraid won't pay them back? Or are US moviegoers too hopped up on summer blockbusters to read subtitles to a good movie? I'm skipping *Quarantine* and waiting for *[REC]* to hit DVD.

Clint – Auburn, Georgia

ALTHOUGH HE'S BEEN out of the limelight for some time, Richard Stanley deserves some recognition. His interviews on the *Dust Devil* box set are incredibly intelligent, asking for his films *Hardware* and *Dust Devil* to be re-examined. His conversations remind me of those of Alejandro Jodorowsky – fast-paced and well-versed without missing a beat. I'm still waiting for the definitive release of *Hardware*, and hopefully some revitalized interest could get this going. Better yet, get Richard Stanley back in the director's chair.

Louis Kiss – address withheld

WANTED! MORE READERS LIKE:



FORREST J ACKERMAN

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL ISSUE you turned out. I am ever grateful that you allowed me to participate. I just picked up a copy from my corner newsstand and showed it to Forry for the first time. I think if you'd have seen his reaction you would have cried (I almost did). He was absolutely surprised and delighted. Forry has a special ritual when he cracks a new mag for the first time. He runs his thumbs up and down the spine as if he's looking for splinters and then turns the whole mag over a few times from back to front. Then he dives in. I documented the moment for you. Thanks so very much for keeping Forry young and in the public eye – where he thrives!

Joe Moe – Horrorweird, Karloffornia

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or email. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

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Dreadlines

News Highlights Horror Happenings

Toronto International Film Festival horror highlights

Although there were fewer horror selections at this year's Toronto International Film Festival than in previous installments, the genre titles that did play – particularly in the Midnight Madness programme – showcased international films intent on breaking conventions and pushing boundaries. Films from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Spain and the US came in the form of everything from genre documentaries to a horror-western mash-up, art house zombies and – in the case of *Martyrs* – enough gore to make at least one audience member vomit in the aisle. Besides seven Midnight Madness titles, three additional films (*Sauna*, *Vinyan* and *Pontypool*) played outside the late-night programme, exposing us to ten new genre entries at this year's TIFF.

Reviews by **Dave Alexander**, **Stuart F. Andrews**, **Liisa Ladouceur** and **Jovanka Vuckovic**



The Burrowers: *Creepy-crawlies on the open range*

ACOLYTES

Jon Hewitt/Australia

Loosely influenced by the real-life crimes of 1970s-era suburban killers in Perth, Australia, *Acolytes* presents an unlikely tale of students who discover a serial killer and attempt to blackmail him into taking out a bully. What starts out as a tense thriller, goes down a path of absurdity as the teenage trio makes increasingly illogical decisions (set to some unfortunate emo tunes) before too many ironic third act plot twists send it off a cliff. Some of the scenes – such as the hunting-humans-with-a-crossbow-in-a-junkyard chase – make no sense at all, and the kids aren't quite likable enough to anchor the story. Despite (or perhaps because of) dressing like a refugee from *Office Space*, Joel Edgerton does add an edge of menace as the killer. *Acolytes*: a good concept but wasted opportunity. **DA**

THE BURROWERS

J.T. Petty/USA

Imagine *Tremors* and *The Descent* meet *The Searchers* with the dark political bent of a Romero film and you've got J.T. Petty's horror-western mash-up *The Burrowers*. When a frontier family goes missing, a posse sets out to find them – assuming a local Indian tribe is at fault. Along the way they run into a cruel military man and his unit, hostile natives and ultimately some very nasty creatures that live in the dirt. Petty deftly balances the two genres while crafting horrifying scenario after horrifying scenario, the sublime grassland vistas make for an effective juxtaposition to *The Burrowers*' relentlessly nihilistic plot, as well. It might be too much horror for serious western fans and too much western for hardcore horror fans, but open minds will embrace the darkness of the open range. **DA**

DEADGIRL

Marcel Sarmiento and Gadi Harel/USA

What would you do if you found a naked female zombie tied to a gurney in an abandoned psychiatric hospital? If you're troubled teen, J.T. (Noah Segan), you'd fuck it repeatedly as it rots. A likely scenario, I'm sure. And that's the ultimate failure of *Deadgirl*: plausibility. While I'm apt to believe there's at least one high school kid out there who wants to put his dick in a pus-hole, it's a stretch to think all of the characters in the movie could be hip to such a dubious kink. Even J.T.'s best friend, Rickie (Shiloh Fernandez), whose heart belongs to a living girl who wants nothing to do with him, can't resist the forbidden allure of undead pussy once it dawns on J.T. that he can "make more of them" for their *pleasure*. Points for originality, but this one failed to turn me on... and I *like* dead girls. **JV**

EDEN LOG

Franck Vestiel/France

Eden Log is the kind of European dark fantasy that pushes boundaries – namely, the pain threshold of its audience. The oppressive, monochromatic tension of its production design quickly becomes an appalling, monotonous tedium when a sad sack named Tolbiac (Clovis Cornillac) wakes up in a techno pit of hell (think *Doom* meets *Sanford and Son*) and proceeds to humble around a bunch of identical-looking locations, desperately trying to find his way to the planet's surface, all while being pursued by a bunch of crappy creatures and dull-as-fuck demons. We have no idea why he's abandoned in the labyrinth, and what's worse, we don't bloody care! This is the sci-fi horror equivalent of the Ludovico Torture Technique and it'll leave you begging for it to end. I suggest recommending it to anyone you need to get vengeance on. Your enemies will fear you forever! **SFA**

MARTYRS

Pascal Laugier/France

Best described as the French *Hostel*, this punishing film about a girl's quest for revenge against a group of people who imprisoned and tortured her as a child was, whether the audience liked it or not, the highlight of the Midnight Madness programme. Unlike its American counterpart, *Mar-*



tyrs delivers a sucker punch of an intro, followed by an inventive second act punctuated by a level of violence exemplary of the French New Wave of Horror. Unfortunately, the film's fatal flaw is its inability to shift gears smoothly. The second act rests too long on unflinching torture sequences that devolve into tedium and ultimately lose their efficacy. Where Gaspar Noé was able to make a brutal eleven-minute rape scene actually work in *Irreversible*, director Pascal Laugier fails to make intimate scenes of protracted beating and force-feeding effective. Finally, the third act, while featuring one of the nastiest punishments ever delivered to a character on film, relies on a standard horror trope: a sophisticated excuse for the violence that's so elaborate it's hard to swallow. And in the end, folks, an excuse is an excuse. That said, I'll excuse it and highly recommend you see *Martyrs* and judge it for yourself. **JV**



Martyrs: *Morjana Alaoui stars as Anna in the most controversial title of the Midnight Madness programme*

NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD: THE WILD, UNTOLD STORY OF OZPLOITATION!

Mark Hartley/Australia

This deranged documentary rifles though the history of Australian exploitation cinema at a rapid-fire pace, covering everything from the sexploitation films of the '70s to the splatter and action flicks of the '80s. It's nothing short of a savage symphony of vehicular explosions, suicidal stuntmen, elaborate pukefests, killer pigs, monster crocs and enough hare bottoms and bulging breasticles to have Russ Meyer jerking off in his grave. Gluing it all together is an exhaustive array of interviews with everyone from George Miller (*Mad Max*) to legendary producer Antony I. Ginnane (*Patrick*, *Dark Age*) to modern-day mavericks such as Greg McLean (*Wolf Creek*, *Rogue*). But it's über-fan/filmmaker Quentin Tarantino who steals the show with his outrageous enthusiasm and expert knowledge of Australia's proud legacy of lunacy. Be warned, though: after intoxicating your eyeballs with this tantalizing tease of Tasmanian-esque trash, you'll be jonesing for a serious overdose of Ozploitation. **SFA**

PONTYPOOL

Bruce McDonald/Canada

Bruce McDonald is arguably the Canadian filmmaker best able to capture this country's counterculture, being one of its coolest denizens himself, and Tony Burgess is one of our most under-rated writers of unsettling, macabre fiction. So McDonald's adaptation of Burgess' zombie short story *Pontypool Changes Everything* was a highly anticipated TIFF premiere, even if the unusual take on an undead outbreak wasn't purely horror. One frigid morning the residents of the small town of Pontypool become infected with a bloodthirsty rage, the details of which are revealed in chaotic reports called into a local radio station, where most of the film takes place. Stephen McHattie is electric as the rogue DJ Grant Mazzy, the Canadian quirks are spot-on and it's a delight to hear Burgess' prose come to life. Unfortunately, attacks you can't see and a conceptual virus only go so far cinematically – it feels too much like a radio drama (which it was originally adapted as). A less literal interpretation of this literate tale – plus more zombie action – would have changed everything about *Pontypool*. **LL**

SAUNA

Antti-Jussi Annila/Finland

This creepy little Finnish film about conscience and consequence has a distinct visual appeal informed by its setting: 1595 in the forests between war-ravaged Sweden and Russia. Here, an unlucky posse of representatives, including two brothers haunted by the dirty deeds of their past, is sent out to mark a tenuous new border. The gritty brown of leather, coagulated blood and barren trees is pierced by stark white upon their arrival in a village that should not exist. The ghosts there would be mystery enough, but they also discover an odd sauna in the middle of nowhere, inside of which lurk unspeakable forces. The message here is not all that revelatory – in war, no one gets out alive – but by allowing no redemption for either the wicked or the innocent, director Antti-Jussi Annila has crafted a haunting elegy to the cruelty of conflict. **LL**

SEXYKILLER

Miguel Martí/Spain

Imagine *American Psycho* with a female lead, but instead of a dark, brooding satire, you have the broad slapstick of Benny Hill with a blood-spattered finale that would make Peter Jackson grin. Well, that's pretty much what you get with *Sexykiller*, a tasty little tale about a naughty medical student named Bárbara. When she's not twirling in designer dresses and shaking her hooty in purty little panties, she's breaking bones, splitting skulls and lacerating flesh with knife skills that would Lorena Bobbitt blush. To put it mildly, this chick kicks arse! And the lady of pain from Spain in question is none other than Macarena Gómez, the weird mermaid chick from Stuart Gordon's *Dagon* – who is totally hilarious, very sexy and an absolute delight to watch, revelling as much in her psychotic meltdowns as in her extensive costume changes. She proved to be a massive hit in her post-screening Q&A session as well (you can find it on YouTube), which turned out to be one of the surprising highlights of this year's Midnight Madness mayhem. **SFA**

VINYAN

Fabrice Du Welz/Belgium

Fabrice Du Welz got our attention a couple years ago with his strange, affecting art house horror entry *Calvaire* and now returns with something equally original. His second feature, *Vinyan*, is more gorgeous than *Calvaire*, just as strange and only really a "horror" film in its last act. A white couple (played by Rufus Sewell and Emmanuelle Béart) living in Thailand hire locals to illegally take them into Burma to search for their son, who went missing during the tsunami and may be living in a village. With shades of *Don't Look Now*, the languid pace slowly drags the characters into a hopeless nightmare, destroying their minds and bodies in the Green Hell of the remote Burmese jungle. Intense. **DA**



Dreadlines

ROADKILL FROM THE INFO HIGHWAY

1959ydl.homestead.com
Archived here: each and every card in the 1959 Funny Monsters "You'll Die Laughing" trading card series. With artwork courtesy of Jack Davis, these one-panel cartoons are still amusing almost fifty years later. The site also hosts a page for collectors looking to find, trade or sell their own Funny Monsters cards. Guaranteed to please the creature-lovin' kid in everyone!

danhillier.com
In Dan Hillier's altered engravings various appendages and clothing sprout Lovecraftian tentacles, while humans merge with mammals, birds, snakes and even insects to form mutated, otherworldly creatures. There's even a section brimming with artwork featuring the human skull. Stop by to shop or browse; we promise you won't be disappointed.

hellpizza.com.au
If you live in Australia you could do far worse than ordering eats from Hell Pizza. With specialty pizzas featuring names like Cursed, Brimstone, Damned, Grimm, Mayhem, Purgatory and Sinister, the only question remaining is why nobody has opened a North American franchise yet?!

deadbooks.com
While not everything about this multimedia hybrid novel works, it's still an interesting experiment in re-imagining more traditional forms of storytelling. The 150-chapter sci-fi horror story concerning the strange town of Landsgate, Vermont utilizes a small army of actors and musicians to tell its tale, and can be previewed for free on the site.

pumpkin-pom.com/zombies/
This "not safe for work" cartoon-illustrated sex guide for zombies covers just about every situation one might encounter during post-life intercourse, including why blow jobs can be a simply terrifying and terrible idea for shamblers. Get some dead good pointers today!

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Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
Got a Roadkill suggestion?
Email a link to: roadkill@rue-morgue.com

First all-horror shorts website launched

At the end of this past summer, five industry vets went live with fewdio.com, a new kind of web destination for the horror community. Devoted exclusively to short films, the site features the work of this California-based filmmaking collective, which first gained attention on YouTube.

"YouTube was amazing as a leaping-off point," admits writer/director David Schneider. "But it quickly became clear that we needed more control over our material and how it was presented. For instance, although most of our films hover around the five-minute mark, we do have a few that break YouTube's ten-minute limit. This got us thinking of all the possibilities we could offer our fanbase on our own website... higher quality video, Easter eggs, and a host of other features coming soon."

Such enthusiasm belies Fewdio's bumble origins during last year's WGA strike. Suddenly these producers, editors, actors and writers found they had ample free time. After airing the fruits of their labours online – most notably *The Easter Bunny is Eating My Candy*, about a little girl who discovers a hungry intruder in the house – they found an audience and got hooked. One film came after another, so that in less than a year they've produced two dozen.

"It was really just friends getting together to make a short film," explains Schneider, who made the Lawrence Bender-produced *Stark Raving Mad* with Fewdio colleague Drew Daywalt. "But we had so much fun and felt we had so many more stories to tell... why not just continue?"

What started as a weekend lark soon became formalized as Fewdio Entertainment when the larger opportunity became clear. "Short films have long been the bastard child of cinema," says Daywalt, "but with the proliferation of short subjects on the internet and mobile devices, horror has a new place to call its own. Comedy as an area is completely saturated. There are a lot of comedy troupes doing comedy sketches online, but we're the first horror troupe."

The reference to comedy is apt, as one of the founding members, Paul Hungerford, is a veteran of the stand-up circuit.



Another member, actor Kirk B. R. Woller, is recognizable from his extensive body of work in such fare as *The X-Files*, *Minority Report* and *Resident Evil: Extinction*.

"We're providing horror fans with little blasts of adrenaline for their iPods, mobile phones and computers," observes Daywalt. "You can get news, comedy, drama and sports in short blasts. We're just giving the horror fans something that's not out there yet. Short horror for a fast-paced world that's clamouring for entertainment."

But Fewdio's ambitions don't end there. Despite its self-funded nature, the members plan to use community-building to dissolve the traditional walls that stand between fans and creators. "Unlike other horror sites," states Daywalt, "here you can actually go right to the filmmakers with no gatekeepers. You wanna know how we got a particular shot? Just ask us."

In keeping with this mentoring role, Fewdio wants to open up its site so other indie filmmakers can post their own efforts. "Basically we'll show [visitors] how we got the pro look with very, very little in equipment or money," promises Schneider. And with pros on board, such as fifth core member, John Crye, these are folks to listen to. At New Market Films, Crye acquired or developed titles such as *Memento* and *Donnie Darko*.

Still, one big question remains: what does the name "Fewdio" actually mean?

"All I can say is that it has to do with an illuminati blood pact among the five members of Fewdio," jokes Daywalt, "and that it's an acronym for something so evil that we can't really talk about it."

Peter Gutiérrez



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THE CORONER'S REPORT 13

Weird Stats & Morbid Facts

✚ Thirteen-year-old Twinkle Dwivedi has a medical condition that has stumped medical professionals across her native India, it causes her to bleed randomly, up to twenty times a day, through her skin, eyes, nose, hairline and even the bottoms of her feet.

✚ *Vampyr* director Carl Dreyer was so obsessed with details that his assistants rounded up numerous spiders, fed them ants and flies (by attracting them with honey), plus a dead mole, and got them to successfully spin webs in the right places on one of the sets to add atmosphere to the film

✚ One of the 18th-century methods of preventing venereal disease involved wrapping up one's genitals in the carcass of a freshly slaughtered chicken.

✚ The working title of David Cronenberg's *Shivers* was *Orgy of the Blood Parasites*.

✚ This past September, Australian customs officials discovered five live pythons and two tarantulas in a package marked "baby toys and shirts" that had been mailed from the US.

✚ According to Tom Mes' *Agitator: The Cinema of Takashi Miike*, as a young Miike enjoyed blowing up frogs with firecrackers.

✚ In 1859, the *Glasgow Medical Journal* featured a case in which a baker's daughter could purportedly withstand the 274-degree temperature of her father's baker's oven for twelve minutes without adverse effect.

✚ The *New York Mirror* paid Edgar Allan Poe ten dollars for his poem "The Raven" when it was first printed in 1845.

✚ The earliest record of capital punishment in England dates back to 450 BC, when criminals were thrown into bogs to drown.

✚ Horror/sci-fi author Whitley Strieber collaborated with himself on *Catmagic*, a book co-written by Strieber and his pseudonym Jonathan Barry.

✚ The Tartars, who inhabited many regions around Mongolia for hundreds of years before and after the time of Genghis Khan, had a tradition that when a man died, his closest relative would be entombed with him.

✚ Actor Lionel Atwill (*Son of Frankenstein*) is remembered as an eccentric who often had himself chauffered about in a bullet-hole-ridden Rolls-Royce.

✚ In October of 1995, senior citizen Mary Williams was killed when a swarm of bees attacked her as she walked past their hive. Williams suffered more than 1000 stings and died in hospital a few days later

Compiled by **Monica S. Kuebler**
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX

Instances of NEEDLE NASTINESS



1. *Imprint*
Miike's demented dentistry

2. *Inside*
Knitting tool traechotomy

3. *Audition*
Asami's excruciating eye-sore

4. *Saw 2*
Torture-porn perforation pit

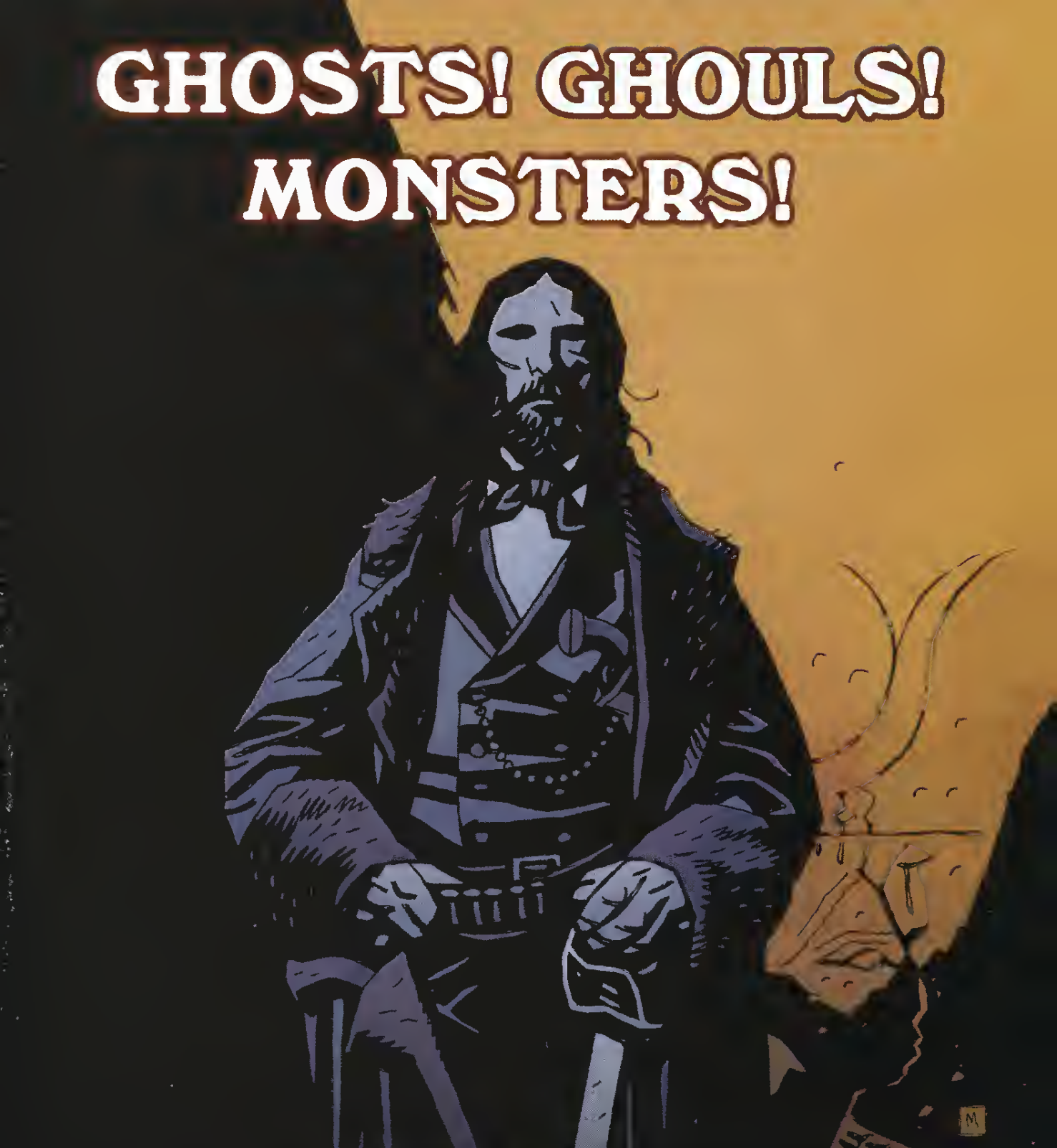
5. *Dead and Buried*
Hospital patient's poked peeper

6. *Re-Animator*
Doc Hill's hypodermic demise



James Fisher **zircocircus.com**

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STAINED SNOW, *Lost Souls*

BY MITCH DAVIS



IT'S A STRANGE WORLD.

Earthquakes can cause rivers to flow backwards. The Liberty Bell was made in England. And a veteran Swedish art house director with no previous experience in the genre has created one of the greatest vampire films ever made. Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In* (*Låt den rätte komma in*) is an instant classic in every sense – one of the very few contemporary fantastic films that will without a doubt retain its significance 50 years from now. It's also, in the opinion of many, the best vampire film since *Near Dark*.

Right One (out this month from Magnolia) is actually Sweden's second vampire film made in recent years, following Anders Bankes' *Frostbitten* (2006), before which time the country had never seen a local production that dealt with bloodsuckers. While *Frostbitten* was a flashy, fun romp produced for maximum audience gratification with a view towards international export, *Right One* is a whisper-quiet, heartfelt slice of Northern European art-horror cinema that compromises for no one.

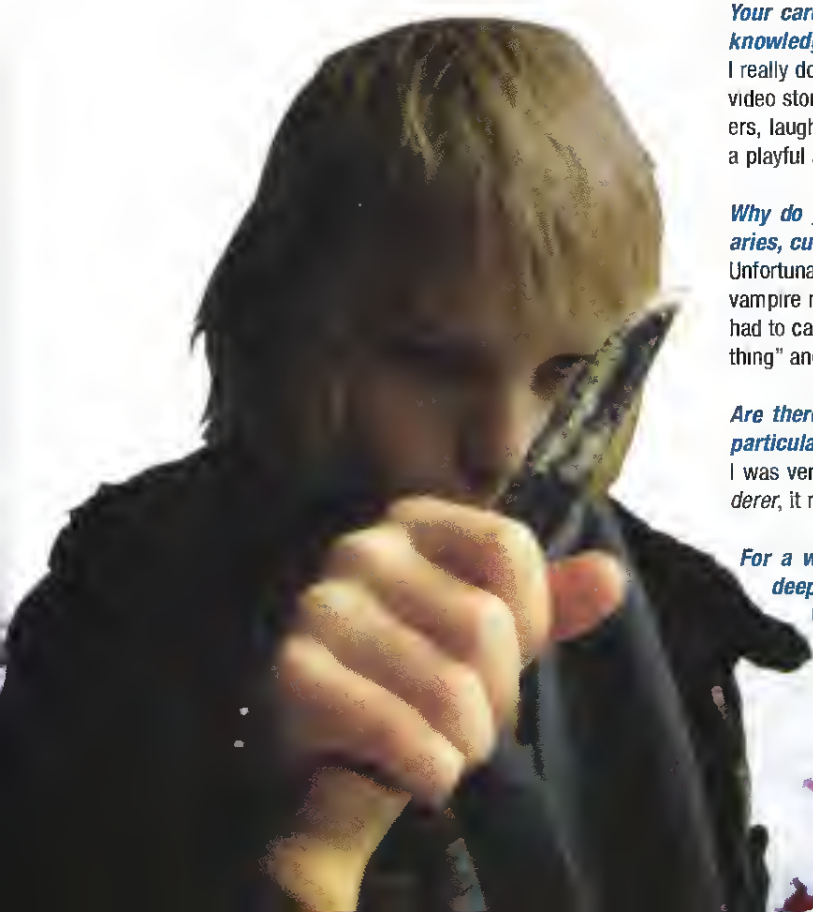
Stunningly photographed, scripted and performed, it's an out-and-out masterpiece that haunts as deeply as it touches, with equal doses of shock, tenderness, fear and sorrow, wrapped into one of the most unique works the genre has seen in ages. Based on the novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist (see p.21) and staged against a snow-caked urban landscape, *Right One* depicts the transformative relationship between a lonely, savagely bullied twelve-year-old boy named Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) and a melancholic young girl who goes by the name of Eli (Lina Leandersson). Eli is also twelve. Eli has been twelve for many years. In fact, she's a vampire.

Oskar stabs trees in the night, his head swirling with thoughts of bloody schoolyard vengeance, but his introverted nature ensures that he won't even raise his voice, let alone act on his anger. This begins to change when he meets Eli, and both are drawn to each other for similar but slightly different reasons. Oskar gives Eli a sense of belonging that she hasn't felt in lifetimes and Eli gives Oskar a parallel sense of connection which awakens an inner strength he had never been aware of. Meanwhile, a brooding middle-aged man is slaughtering strangers around town, slashing their necks and draining their blood.

Right One is that rare kind of film that transcends genre. It follows the classical rules of vampire mythology, reinventing each in smart and surprising ways, while functioning at its core is a poetic individualistic beast that is equal parts outsider coming-of-age film and mysterious love story. Caustic brutality and nightmarish imagery erupt just as organically as moments of fragility, illumination and loss, sometimes punctuated by the blackest of humour – that morbidly poignant kind of comedy that could only emerge from tragedy and genuine horror. The proverbial Complete Package, the film engages audiences viscerally, emotionally and intellectually in a dream-like yet compellingly real universe of contrasting tones and provocative subtexts, not the least of which is the almost BDSM-like aspect of power exchanges and servitude roles through which many of the film's characters relate.

For a work that might appear on paper to be too unconventional and personal for mass audiences, *Right One* has captivated viewers worldwide, winning public and jury prizes at a wealth of film festivals. It plays just as strongly to fans of *Cries and Whisperers* as it does to those of *Cloverfield* – whose director, Matt Reeves, has, for better or worse, already signed on to write and direct the US remake.

Tomas Alfredson has made a film of uncommon power, meticulously shaped with sensitivity, control and attention to the most borderline subconscious of details (for one, the sounds of saliva clicks were added to dialogue tracks in key sequences in order to enhance a sense of proximity). If you're wondering how this genre outsider managed to create the best horror movie of the year, in the following interview, Alfredson reveals the technical aspects and cinematic ambitions behind his captivating film.



The Darker Side Of Adolescent Alienation: *Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) fantasizes about getting revenge on his bullies*

Your career in filmmaking spans roughly eighteen years, yet to my knowledge, this is your first venture into the horror genre.

I really don't bother thinking of which shelf my work will end up on in the video store. When I read screenplays, I choose those which give me shivers, laughter, make me see images and make me hear music – it's quite a playful and uncomplicated thing.

Why do you think the vampire mythology crosses so many boundaries, culturally, cinematically and historically?

Unfortunately you're asking the wrong person – I'm totally ignorant about vampire mythology, and each time I had to learn something for the film, I had to call to author John Ajvide Lindqvist and ask, "How about this garlic thing" and such.

Are there certain vampire or genre stories in general that you find particularly vital as filmmaker?

I was very fond of Patrick Süskind's book *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, it really had an original touch to it.

For a work that's based on pre-existing material, your film feels deeply personal. What attracted you to the idea of adapting* Right One *and which elements of your own did you choose to



infuse into the storyline?

When I read the book three years ago, I was totally blown away by author John Ajvide Lindqvist's unsentimental attitude narrating the bullied boy, Oskar. I really think that you shouldn't cinematize good books, but this one was worth an exception. I suppose a lot of memories from my own childhood came to the surface reading it. It's impossible to make such an emotional investment as you have to do, making this kind of film, without being deeply touched. The book is a masterpiece of its own and has, of course, several subplots and tracks we couldn't follow up in the screenplay. After meticulous discussions we decided to concentrate on the romantic path, the love story between Oskar and Eli. Mr. Lindqvist also wrote the screenplay and made a fantastic work, although he had to put the knife deeply into his own book.

One of the novel's aspects that was significantly economized for the screen is the character of Håkan who, as disturbing as he is in the film, was an even more upsetting character on the page. How did Lindqvist and yourself ultimately reach the screen version of this character?

In the book Håkan is an obvious pedophile, and child molesting is a very strong ingredient to deal with on film. It's too often carelessly used as an effect, to make a character really, really nasty – crazy, without depth or ambition to take responsibility for the mechanisms behind it. In the film version, it would have affected the focus in the wrong way. In the film he has a mysterious appearance and to me he is either an old "Oskar" – an old lover to Eli – or the opposite, the kind of man she can live close to, a person who she despises, because of the fact that love and nearness is her only threat.

While the theme of religion is not given much play in the film's narrative,* Right One*'s visuals are bursting with religious symbolism. Could you comment on that?

I would rather not comment on that. When you are a filmmaker you have a gigantic palette of colours to paint with. Some components are too fragile to talk about and could damage its magic if discussed.

What was your process for working with cinematographer Hoyte Van Hoytema?

We tried very hard to work with plainness – no unnecessary cutting, designing the scenery, having the characters coming close to the camera in a close-up, rather than cutting to one. We studied renaissance painters for the delicate lighting and also to try to understand how the old masters worked with eye-beams. There are a lot of breathtaking pictures of painter Hans Holbein that are really creepy – for example, a portrait of a young British prince that looks, though it's a close-up, below the viewer. There's a huge amount of power in pointing out of the frame. Filmmakers use that too rarely. Hoyte's as much a painter as he is a cinematographer; I'm very thankful to have had the opportunity to work with him.

Your film frequently makes striking use of the contrast between interior and exterior spaces. It's a hugely effective and very interesting choice. What drew you to this manner of staging?

When winter strikes hard in Sweden I ask myself how the hell somebody came up with the idea to establish themselves here in beginning of time and how they managed to survive? The cold impoverished life out of everything – the outdoor landscape turns into marble, yet people are struggling on in this environment that's not supposed to be lived in. The day after a night's snowfall is so deafening, all you hear is your heartbeat, your breath, even the movements of your eyelids. Yet, it's so stunningly beautiful and bright and clean. And in contrast; artificial life indoors in artificial heat, the static electricity when you pull off a polyester sweater, the dry skin on your feet stuck to the broadloom, food brought to you from another continent, swimming in a pool heated up by a distant nuclear power plant.

Kåre Hedebrant and Lina Leandersson turn in wonderfully unconventional and textured performances. Both roles give

Young Blood Lust: *Eli (Lina Leandersson) feeds on a local, and (above) a disfigured Håkan (Per Ragnar)*



the impression of being intuitively performed which, particularly given the ages of the actors, is an extraordinary achievement. How did you find them and in what way did you approach their direction?

In Sweden we don't have professional child actors and you have to advertise open casting calls to find the actors you need. I've worked with children a lot and I suppose I'm quite experienced in directing them. There are no secrets, just be yourself, explain things in a comprehensible way without sounding like a child yourself, be honest and listen. I also do a lot of direction when the camera is running; the sound editors hate it. Kåre and Lina are both very intelligent and ambitious and approached their tasks very seriously.

Given that they weren't relying on previous training, how did they prepare for the more melancholic and violent aspects of their roles?

It's not meaningful to try to describe the synthesis of a sequence – a longer time span – to children at this age. For example, a sequence of four scenes:

A: A boy is walking, unhappy, on a road, licking his lips, maybe he's hungry?
B: The boy is looking at candy through a shop's window, looks in his empty wallet.
C: He sits on his bed at home chewing, surrounded by 50 empty toffee wrappers.
D. The kid vomits in the toilet, you can hear his mother outside calling for dinner, but he doesn't answer.

> "WHEN WINTER STRIKES HARD IN SWEDEN I ASK MYSELF HOW THE HELL SOMEBODY CAME UP WITH THE IDEA TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES HERE IN BEGINNING OF TIME AND HOW THEY MANAGED TO SURVIVE?"
>
> TOMAS ALFREDSON

For the viewer, this sequence maybe would be perceived as if the boy is broke, that he is stealing, that he has an eating disorder and that he is hiding it from his mother. These four scenes would probably not be shot in continuity, most likely with weeks in between. I would direct the boy in scene A: "You're walking home from school, when you come side by side with a blue car. You stop for four seconds and think really hard about nice juicy beef " In scene B I would say, "Look at the candy, it looks really nice, then check if you have any money in your wallet." We would have prepared the empty wallet in advance without the boy knowing it was empty, so that his reaction would be as spontaneous as possible. In scene C I would say, "Boy, you're really tired after having eaten all these candies," and in scene D I'd say, "You're sick and you're puking" – probably not mentioning anything about the mother outside the door, whose off-screen line would be put in place at another occasion. Working this way, the child actor will not have to take the responsibility for delivering the whole construction in each and every building block. Instead, we'd focus on the everyday comprehensible feelings and actions. Neither Kåre or Lina got to read the script in advance, they got their scenes every morning, if it was short scenes I would read them aloud.



Spontaneous Combustion: *A "turned" victim bursts into flames, and (below) director Tomas Alfredson*

I heard that for Leandersson's performance as Eli, you ultimately chose to dub her voice to achieve a different impact.

The ambition was to make the appearance of Eli as androgynous as possible and Lina's voice is beautiful but too high in pitch, I thought, so we overdubbed it with another girl – whose name is Elif! – who has a deeper and more boyish inflection. It was an enormous endeavour to get this right, with a new casting process. The sound editors almost broke into pieces, but in the end it worked really well.

Did you have difficulty casting the child actors for such unsettling material?

These two kids were doing a lot of complicated stuff without bitching, late at night nearly freezing their feet off. But when it came to kissing...

The bullies in your film are unusually cruel. Is this a reflection of where the new generation of Scandinavian children – or perhaps children in general – are at or did you embellish this aspect?

The book is autobiographical, except for the vampire stuff, and I suppose it mirrors the feelings John Ajvide Lindqvist experienced being bullied. Memories can change or be modified through the years, but I think the feelings attached to the memories can never be untrue. The story and its characters are therefore totally truthful and honest.

There's a heightened naturalism to your film that creates its own hypnotic atmosphere – an almost dream-like naturalism, if that makes any sense. How did this come about?

I tried to do the storytelling as dry, dull and everyday-like as possible. There's a big difference, though, in creating a boring feeling, and actually being boring! When the character Håkan slaughters the young boy in the beginning of the film, I tried to do it as non-dramatically as possible. The killing is very heavy-handed, almost comic, and slow as I would think any killing would be in reality. No orchestra around, no fancy police helicopters, no clicking, ticking gadgets, evil laughter, just a 50-year-old teacher struggling with some really freaky business in a suburb that could have been yours.

How long did it take to shoot the film, and were the many night shoots difficult? Was it mostly shot on practical locations?

It was shot in 52 days and not in any especially practical locations. A lot of it was shot in Luleå, a town in the very north of Sweden, to



JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST DISCUSSES LET THE RIGHT ONE IN, HIS BEST-SELLING NOVEL THAT'S EVEN DARKER THAN THE MOVIE.

YEAR OF THE Vampire

Scandinavian DEAD

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

WHEN ONE THINKS OF SWEDEN, many things could pop to mind. ABBA, IKEA, meatballs, massage, chocolate. The one that probably won't: vampires. Not surprising, since Sweden's not particularly known for its genre output. However, John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Let the Right One In* (and its new feature film adaptation) seem well poised to change that.

The book was released in Sweden in 2004 as *Låt den rätte komma in*, and first appeared in English as *Let Me In*, in 2007, before being reissued last month under its full title (by Thomas Dunne Books). It's the poignant tale of a young bullied boy (Oskar) who discovers a soulmate in centuries-old vampire, Eli (who, though it's understated in the film, is forever trapped in the emasculated body of a twelve-year-old boy) is even darker and more brooding in its original book form. Within its 472 pages lives an even larger group of dysfunctional locals, and it's also made much more implicit that Eli's adult companion Håkan is, in fact, a pedophile. The red stuff flows more freely here too, and Lindqvist successfully twists the vampire mythology – making it a form of parasitic infection – for a refreshing take on the bloodsuckers. It's surprising then that Lindqvist does not particularly like vampires or most vampire stories.



"To be honest, I am really fed up with this whole vampire thing," he admits. "I'm not a vampire fan at all. And always when I go into a horror bookstore or go to the horror shelves, half the books there are vampire books. I haven't read one of them. ... The only vampire figure that I could possibly be interested in writing a story about would be someone like Eli. Just the poverty and the disgusting, lonely aspects of being a vampire. I mean, basically being a human – especially if you are twelve-years-old – who has to kill other people to drink their blood in order to survive. It's a miserable existence. But as I understand it, a lot of the vampire stuff doesn't really deal with that aspect."

Lindqvist's book is bleak indeed, and that bleakness encompasses more than just the vampires. It's set in the winter of 1981 in the Stockholm suburb of Blackeberg, a place brimming with downtrodden characters – drunks, teenage thieves, schoolyard bullies, unhappy couples and the aforementioned murderous pedophile, who, in the novel, just won't stay dead, even when he's little more than a shambling zombie, driven by the parasite within him.

"I was like 100 to 120 pages into the novel and [Håkan] was much more of a Patrick Bateman kind of guy, doing this for lost power and money," explains Lindqvist, who tried his hand as both a magician and stand-up comic before becoming an author. "And it was just complete rubbish, shit, the thing I was writing. Because I couldn't get any emotional identification at all out of a character like that. So I ask myself, 'If it isn't that, why would he do this? Why would he kill young people to supply this vampire with blood?' Because he is in a perverted sense in love. He does it for passion. And for passion you can do almost anything."

At its heart, *Let the Right One In* is a story about wanting to find love, acceptance and personal empowerment, as witnessed through both the friendship of Eli and Oskar, as well as the more carnal inclinations of Håkan – they all seek to be loved, if not always in the most normal or socially acceptable ways.

Like many first novels, the book's also autobiographical to a certain extent, particularly in regards to some of the bullying experienced by Oskar, which is why Lindqvist chose to set the book in his hometown during the same period he grew up there.

"It was a very good way for me to get a more emotional – melodramatic even – tone in the story, by more or less using a lot of my own childhood memories," says Lindqvist. "The life of the main protagonist, Oskar, is similar to mine in the emotional sense, even though none of the exact things that happened to him in the book happen to me."

In fact, it was the very personal nature of this story that made the author so determined to write the screenplay himself ("...if someone is going to mess it up, I need it to be me."). And though it is no easy task to trim a tome the size of *Let the Right One In* down to a single feature-length script, Lindqvist was able to accomplish it by keeping it focused on Eli and Oskar, while stripping away several of the book's other subplots. The process was only made smoother by Lindqvist and director Tomas Alfredson's strong working relationship.

"It was a match made in heaven," Lindqvist notes. "We have had no arguments whatsoever about how to make this movie. And the first time Tomas showed me eight minutes of footage that he had made, I started crying, and cried during the complete showing, because I thought he had captured the feeling and the emotional content perfectly with his imagery."



Something In The Ice: *A gruesome discovery in a frozen lake darkens a class field trip*

guarantee the cold and the snow. Some nights it was as low as -20 degrees Fahrenheit and it felt as if someone was constantly shouting in your ear. The children – especially Lina, who had very little and thin clothes – were very courageous. The close-ups of the children conversing outside Oskar's house were shot in a sub-cooled studio in order to get the focus and calm required. I would think twice if I was offered to do an outdoor arctic drama again.

The cat attack set piece seemed like it would have been a nightmare to stage.

Yes, that was a tough one and it consumed a substantial part of the budget. There are some shots that were as nightmarish as that one to complete, but aren't so obviously CGI as a result because of the fact that it's common knowledge that you really can not induce twenty cats to attack an actor on command. It's draining to do months of meetings and preparations for twenty seconds of cat-hell in comparison to having three hours in the studio to do a complicated emotional scene that becomes four minutes of film, but that is also the charm of the trade.

The sound design of the film is very subtle; it's so deeply woven into the film's atmosphere.

I wanted the soundscape to be as if you were inside their heads. If you're very sparing with sound, you have to be very careful with what you put there, what's surrounded by silence. If you have a panorama of a city and you only hear the sound of a bird, you'll immediately start looking for a bird in the frame and you will start making conclusions and assumptions, it keeps the audience alert and researching. It's the same with framing – you should think as much about what's left out of the frame as what's in it.

Right One ***fits easily in the universe of personal Scandinavian art cinema, yet these films have traditionally played to very specialized audiences, whereas yours seems to work universally, to almost every audience. Why do you think that is and does it surprise you?***

Yes, it's surprising beyond belief and I really can not say why. Maybe it's the specificness that makes it universal?

Right One ***was shot on 35mm film. Was there pressure to shoot digitally the way so many Swedish films seem to be produced these days?***

It was obvious that this was to be shot on film and I can't recall anybody objecting to that – 35mm is still superior to anything else no matter what they say or how many charts and diagrams the engineers refer to. Film has a poetry to it that is indefinable. Swedes are very keen on new technology and if there's a new gadget everybody runs for it like children without asking why or for what purpose; "I have the new iPod with the megamuch processor and the super-duper screen!" "Yeah, and what music do you have inside?"

How do you feel about the current state of Swedish cinema and where do you see it going?

We have some quite rough times here with illegal downloading draining the film industry. We are the online-est country in the world and everyone has a top-of-the-line computer with a broadband connection and the legislation is years behind protecting copyrights. We're nine million people and almost everyone in the world doesn't speak Swedish, so it's a tough battle we fight. But Swedish filmmakers are a long suffering little people, strong as Vikings, protected by our king and queen and the songs of ABBA.

> "THE BOOK IS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL, EXCEPT FOR THE VAMPIRE STUFF, AND I SUPPOSE IT MIRRORS THE FEELINGS JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST EXPERIENCED BEING BULLIED."
>
> **TOMAS ALFREDSON**

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STEPHENIE MEYER'S BEST-SELLING YOUNG ADULT NOVEL *Twilight* IS A VAMPIRE ROMEO AND JULIET TALE ABOUT LOVE, BLOOD LUST AND THE DANGERS OF BEING MORTAL. THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED FILM ADAPTATION HITS THEATRES THIS MONTH.



Young BLOOD *lovers*

BY MONICA S. KNEHLER

COUNTLESS FILMS AND NOVELS HAVE FEATURED vampires of every size, shape and temperament, each presenting a unique take on their mythos. Sometimes it seems as though there's one for everyone – even teens. They've been envisioned as hungry, evil, violent, misunderstood, drop-dead gorgeous, repentant, power-mad and, increasingly, even as great romantics, making them perhaps the most versatile classic monster of them all. In recent years, vampires have taken something of a backseat to the zombie craze, but now with *Let the Right One In*, HBO series *True Blood* (see p.29), *30 Days of Night* and the hugely popular *Twilight* franchise, they're back – with a bloody vengeance.

"[Vampires are] beautiful and sexy," muses *Twilight* screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg about their enduring appeal. "But it's interesting, there's an inner demon in them, as there is in all of us. So there's a universal experience; they're enough like us [and] they're a wonderful metaphor for how we battle our own demons. They're constantly fighting that inner darkness. So I think we can relate to them. They're, you know, superhuman, [so] there's a wish-fulfillment element in it, but there's also a relatability to it…more so than to any of the other creatures that have come and gone in the sci-fi/fantasy world, because they are most like us."

True enough, in *Twilight* (in theatres November 21 from Summit Entertainment) – which Rosenberg describes as more Anne Rice than *Buffy* – becoming a vampire means transforming into a flawlessly beautiful and powerful creature that can live forever. A monster-fied fountain of youth, if you will, and of course there's a hell of lot of appeal to that.

"For me, most other monsters aren't sexy," explains the film's director Catherine Hardwicke (*Thirteen*, *Lords of Dogtown*). "Mummies are gross, zombies are disgusting, werewolves are a bit too hairy for my taste, but vampires? Hot. They're always hot. The neck, the erogenous zone – the myth that goes back thousands of years. People have always been fascinated with blood and mortality, you know, the seduction myth. Many cultures have this myth: the Egyptians, the Indonesians… you find it all over the world."

So, perhaps this latest mainstream resurgence is not so surprising after all. What is, is that it is due in part to a genre-crossing young adult novel, *Twilight* (2005), from then-unproven first-time author, Stephenie Meyer, that

MUMMIES ARE GROSS, ZOMBIES ARE DISGUSTING, WEREWOLVES ARE A BIT TOO HAIRY FOR MY TASTE, BUT VAMPIRES? HOT.

Catherine Hardwicke

was aimed squarely at teenage girls, which landed on the *New York Times* best-seller list and spawned three sequels. Not since the Harry Potter phenomenon have teens been so hyped about a series of books, going so far as to lineup at midnight just to get their hands on the latest installment. And as J.K. Rowling's series taught us, anything *that* popular will not only rope in adult readers, too, but will also undoubtedly spark a publishing trend (for a round-up of recent young adult vampire novels, including Meyer's *Twilight* saga, see p.26).

The story concerns seventeen-year-old Bella Swan (Kirsten Stewart: *Jumper*, *Panic Room*), who has relocated to Forks, a small town in Washington state, to live with her father. Bella is pretty but average, accident-prone and curious, yet still full the exact sort of insecurities common to all girls her age. She really is the "everygirl," which is undeniably a key part of *Twilight*'s appeal. So, when she first spots the mysterious and hypnotically beautiful Cullen clan in the cafeteria of her new school, she gets a bit obsessed. Later, when she meets the youngest Cullen, Edward (Robert Pattinson: Cedric Diggory in the *Harry Potter* films), and he reacts strangely to her (because hers is the only human mind he can't read), she becomes even more intrigued. And thus begins the complicated tale of Bella and Edward, who is – yes, you guessed it – a vampire. Essentially it's a *Romeo and Juliet*-style narrative played out with popular horror tropes.

"Bella is obsessively in love with this guy and she will do anything she can to be with him: she'll die, she'll become a vampire, and that's intoxicating," says Hardwicke. "You just get into it and start bleeding along with her. ... I think the fact that [Meyer] touched on so many things – the transformation you go through as a vampire, your lust, your desire – that is all relevant to teenage life. The way your body's changing, your mind is changing as a teenager, it's all kind of wrapped up in there. And there's this incredible lust that you have for a girl for the first time in your life if you're a teenage boy or whatever, and then you have to control it. You're not supposed to attack every girl you see. Edward and the vampires are fighting their primal urges on so many levels."

Of course, like any good story, there's a lot more to it than teenage pining. Meyer's vamps can subsist on animal blood, which is what the Cullens do in order to live in ordinary society undetected. But most vamps still prefer to dine on humans, who they view as nothing more than convenient "snacks." As such, there is the constant threat that these more traditional vampires who occasionally drift through the Cullen's territory won't be quite so understanding of their lifestyle. In fact, it's one such vampire, James (Cam Gigandet), who sets his sights on Bella – as dinner – and raises the ante for everyone.



"The James character has a very dry sense of humour, very dark and dry," explains Rosenberg, herself no stranger to writing iniquitous characters, having worked on all three seasons of *Dexter*. "So now we're getting into territory that actually moves a little closer to *Dexter*... the utter lack of humanity in these characters is fun to write. As a writer you're freed, for the moment, of all propriety and boundaries, and you kind of go, 'if I were evil, what would I say? What would I do?' and it's quite the release."

While both Hardwicke and Rosenberg attest that the movie is extremely faithful to the novel, some changes were required to make the mostly talky story interesting for the big screen. The most notable of these is the earlier introduction of the human-hunting vamps, who don't actually appear in Meyer's book until later, thus, allowing them a bigger, more menacing part, in the film.

"They're just these great, rich characters, and they're the focus of the entire climactic ending," explains Rosenberg. "I realized from the very start that we really needed to see them and lay them in earlier,

YEAR OF THE Vampire

ON THE HEELS OF *TWILIGHT* TEEN VAMPIRE STORIES HAVE BECOME A HOT COMMODITY. RUE MORGUE SURVEYS THE CURRENT CROP OF YOUNG ADULT BLOODSUCKER FICTION.

VAMPIRE HIGH

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER



TWILIGHT SAGA

Stephenie Meyer
Little, Brown

It would be remiss to comment on the various teen vampire series released (and reissued) in the wake of Stephenie Meyer's insanely popular *Twilight* "saga" without taking a closer look at the books that launched the current craze.

Meyer's novels tell the story of seventeen-year-old Isabella ("Bella") Swan and the vampire, Edward Cullen, that she falls head-over-heels in love with after moving back to Forks, Washington to live with her father. Over the course of four books (*Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse* and *Breaking Dawn*), the unlikely duo struggles with what is perhaps an even unlikelier relationship. From the get-go, Edward tries to push Bella away (even though he is equally enamoured with her), understanding that nothing but danger can come from tangling with vamps. At points, this brings both of them within inches of their own deaths. But Bella is nothing if not persistent and hopelessly devoted – even willing to become a vampire (which typically means suffering years of uncontrollable bloodlust) if that's what it takes.

Like Edward, the rest of the Cullens choose not to feed from humans; they have a tenuous agreement with the local Native reservation, several members of which become werewolves (including Bella's best friend, Jacob) tasked with protecting the community from vampires. They're none too pleased with Bella's decision to associate with the bloodsuckers and vow to wage war with them should she ever "turn." Another threat comes in the form of the less humane vamps that regularly pass through their territory; but perhaps the biggest danger of all are the Volturi, a collective of extremely powerful and ruthless old vampires who oversee the undead and will not hesitate to annihilate any bloodsucker that breaks the rules, displeases or refuses to join them – of course, they too have an ultimatum for Bella.

Though the *Twilight* saga is horror-lite, one can't help but respect Meyer's keen attention to detail and her ability to craft characters that are not only engaging, but feel entirely genuine. While the visceral moments are few and far between, the vampire and werewolf communities (and histories) are so well developed that it is easy to lose yourself in this intimate *Romeo and Juliet*-style drama about a teenage girl torn between her human life and the vampire she loves.

HOUSE OF NIGHT NOVELS

P.C. Cast and Kristin Cast
St. Martin's Griffin



The *House of Night* series (including *Marked*, *Chosen*, *Betrayed* and *Untamed*) may initially throw older readers for a loop due to its awkwardly introduced revisionist vampire mythology. Firstly, a person who is destined to become a vampire gets Marked as a teen – this is random and can happen to anyone – at which point the student is shipped off to a nearby House of Night academy to receive training as a vampire fledgling before completing the final change. Not all students survive the process, however – some bodies simply reject the transition, causing the teens to die an excruciating death, during which blood pours out of their orifices.

The mother/daughter writing team behind the series has also chosen to intertwine vampire mythology with witchcraft, their vamps take part in Wiccan-esque rituals and worship the Goddess Nyx. While this is initially a little hard to swallow, by the second book the fast-paced story will have you forgiving these nitpicks.



The story follows Zoey Redbird, the only fledgling in vampire history to have a fully filled-in "Mark" and a talent for channelling all five of the elements. What almost no one knows, however, is that Zoey has been hand-picked by Goddess Nyx herself to fight corruption at the local House of Night school. It seems the school's high priestess has become involved in something dark and sinister, something that sees her turning students who didn't survive the change (including Zoey's former roommate) into mysterious revenant-type creatures.

Though the *House of Night* books suffer slightly from what feels like a weak editor (show, don't tell!), they ultimately succeed because Zoey is so damned personable, even when she's making foolish decisions. Additionally, the series boasts so many twists and turns, and an ever-escalating storyline, à la *Harry Potter*, that it becomes easier and easier to give yourself over to the ride and suspend your disbelief. Flawed but fun, these books revel in their decidedly unusual reinvention of the classic bloodsuckers.

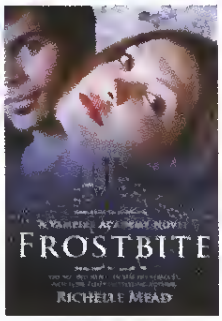


VAMPIRE ACADEMY

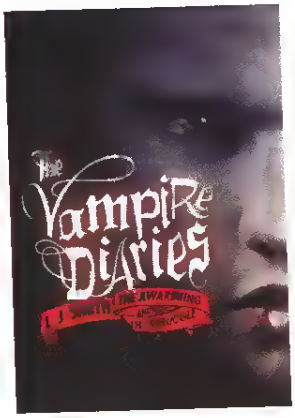
Richelle Mead
Razorbill

For her *Vampire Academy* series, author Richelle Mead borrows loosely from both Romanian and Balkan folklore to form her vampire society, which is comprised of Moroi (living vampires, typically good), Strigoi (dead vampires, always bad) and Dhampir (half-vamps with one Moroi parent and one Dhampir parent). In Mead's world, the Moroi are constantly hunted by the Strigoi, while the Dhampir, who possess the best traits of both vampires and humans, are tasked with protecting the Moroi, who have long refused to use their own elemental powers for combat.

The storylines revolve around Moroi princess Lissa Dragomir and her Dhampir best friend, Rose Hathaway, who is training to become her guardian. Lissa and Rose have been permanently linked (a.k.a. shadow-kissed) ever since the day that Lissa brought Rose back to life following a terrible car crash. But no one can know that Lissa has the ability to resurrect dead things, not only because people would try to use her gift for selfish purposes, but because using it has the unfortunate side effect of rendering her mentally unstable. Add to this the fact that Rose has a short temper and a penchant for getting tangled up with people she shouldn't and you have a surprisingly entertaining story about a pair of best friends with a very dangerous secret.



Mead has constructed a compelling portrait of a society on the brink of revolution/extinction – either the Moroi will need to harness their powers so they may fight alongside the Dhampir, or risk dying out along with their guardian race. There's also a lot of thought-provoking commentary here about societal roles, particularly in regards to blood-sharing (seen as weak, dirty and sexual) and the fact that Moroi will impregnate Dhampir, but rarely ever marry or partner with them (essentially rendering them as breeding stock to ensure the survival of both races). This might be heady stuff for teens, but grown-ups will no doubt appreciate the intelligent world-building on display here.



THE VAMPIRE DIARIES

L.J. Smith
HarperTeen

When Stefan moves to Fell's Church, Virginia it's because he wants to start over and live amongst humans. His plan is railroaded, however, when he encounters Elena, a teenage girl who bears a striking resemblance to the vampire who turned him, the long-dead love of his life. He tries to avoid her, but it's hard, especially since Elena is the most popular girl in school and used to always getting what she wants. When Stefan later saves her from being raped at the hands of a drunken classmate, their connection only strengthens. But all is not happily ever after, as Elena's best friend-turned-enemy and her would-be rapist have a plan to frame Stefan for a series of strange assaults that have been plaguing the area. Then there's Damon, Stefan's bloodthirsty vampire brother, who is actually responsible for the attacks and has decided that he wants Elena for himself. Worse, it's something he intends to accomplish by turning her into a vampire, which will ensure she's hopelessly devoted to the one who changed her.

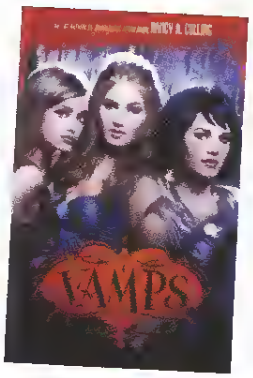
The Vampire Diaries (previously published in 1991 and reissued last year) is surprisingly dark and violent. Damon is downright frightening as the mind game-playing vampire who has no trouble stalking Elena, aligning himself with her family and even getting himself invited into her home. He simply does not take no for an answer – ever! The book series tells the tale through a narrative interspersed with occasional pages from Elena's diary, a conceit that works rather well to humanize her and explain away some of the more obnoxious elements of her "Queen of the School" attitude.



It's worth noting that author L.J. Smith has another young adult series called *Night World*, which revolves around a series of loosely connected characters, including vampires, werewolves and witches. Volume One contains a rather poignant novella (*Secret Vampire*) about a teenage girl diagnosed with incurable cancer and the best friend who wants to transform her into a vampire to cure her, even though it could very well mean death for them both.

VAMPS

Nancy A. Collins
HarperTeen



Of the four series reviewed here, *Vamps* is the most forgettable. Authored by genre scribe Nancy A. Collins, who previously penned a series of vampire novels for adults (including *Sunglasses After Dark*), it concerns a group of über-rich, über-beautiful, über-spoiled fledgling vampires who attend an exclusive prep school for Old Blood. In *Vamps*, the bloodsuckers adhere to a strict social hierarchy; the aforementioned Old Bloods are wealthy, powerful and claim ancient birthrights, while the New Bloods are comprised of those who do not share this lineage or who are born to mixed parents. Both groups are hunted by the Van Helsings, humans who are descended from the famous vampire hunter and continue the family monster-slaying tradition. Lilith Todd and her friends are Old Bloods – in fact, Lilith's dad is one of the most prominent vamps of them all. However, this doesn't stop her from getting into trouble – first, for drinking blood from a notable human at a club, then later at a park where her clique gets into an altercation with both a New Blood vampire named Cally and a group of Van Helsings. Expectedly, when Cally is forced to enroll at Lilith's exclusive prep school at her mysterious father's behest, things get even uglier.

The primary problem with *Vamps* is its absolute dearth of likeable characters. By choosing to spend so much time on the rich bitches, Collins does herself a huge disservice, as these are easily the least interesting characters of the lot. And while this is the first book in the series, it still feels like too many loose ends are left hanging come the final chapter. Simply put: it just doesn't function well as a stand-alone novel. Additionally, the constant name-dropping of designer fashions wears very thin very quickly, making this one YA vampire novel you won't want to sink your teeth into.



and so taking what Stephenie created in this last quarter of the book then just sort of expanding them and saying, 'Okay, well, before they got here, what were they doing?' So taking these characters that are so great and sort of peppering them in so that you can have that sense of impending doom that's coming throughout."

While the film does adhere to a PG-13 rating, Hardwicke notes that "you can go pretty far with that" and that the violence in the book has been ramped up for the film. In particular, the pivotal (and inevitable) showdown between Edward and James promises to be even more brutal. This makes perfect sense when one considers how Meyer reinvented the vampire mythology for her series, and how those attributes will inevitably translate to the screen. Meyer's vampires are ridiculously strong, can move mind-numblingly fast, have a variety of unusual talents, don't require an invite to enter a dwelling and can walk in sunlight (though not without "sparkling").

"In every scene you want to be able to see what is extraordinary about these creatures," explains Rosenberg. "That they are suddenly there when they weren't before – the movement is fast, the awareness is faster than others. When they walk into a room, they *walk* into a room, the eyes just naturally move towards them, and [we had to look] at every scene from that perspective. There's never a moment in the scene where it's not like, 'Okay, this is someone who is slightly different and interesting and intriguing.' And then as much as possible showing those moments of extra strength and power and their individual gifts."

For the film, these vampiric traits were achieved primarily through practical effects combined with CGI where necessary. The most challenging of them all turned out to be the vamps unusual daytime sparkle.

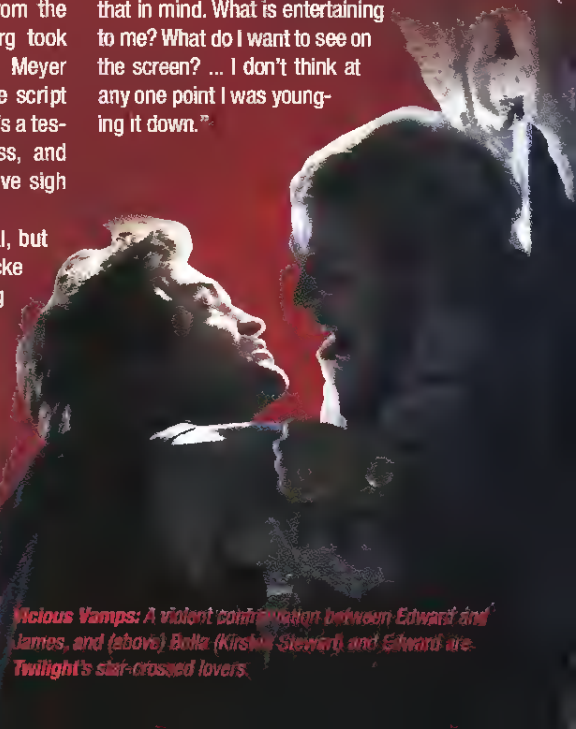
"You want to stick very closely to the book, where it looks like diamonds and radiates in the sunlight, but you also want Edward to look beautiful and attractive," Hardwicke elaborates. "So, how do you visualize that? [In] our first attempt he looked a bit pockmarked, like he had a bad case of diamond acne. We didn't really want that. We're working on finding a visual way to get that contradiction that Stephenie's basically built in – smooth skin, but it sparkles like diamonds. ... We studied what crystals, glittering crystals look like, what phosphorescent fish deep in the ocean look like, diamond purses, all kinds of things, to figure out how to make it work."

Unlike many book-to-film adaptations where the author's input is notably absent from the proceedings, Hardwicke and Rosenberg took the opposite approach, liaisoning with Meyer throughout the entire process from the script phase through to the film's final edits. It's a testament to the adaptation's faithfulness, and one that's bound to generate a collective sigh of relief from the book's legion of fans.

"She had a role, it wasn't contractual, but we wanted her to be involved," Hardwicke explains. "So, right at the very beginning of the process, Melissa and I met her at one of the book signings in Pasadena. ... Then we instantly started emailing and phone calling – any questions we would have, any doubts. I immediately went to Forks and researched the real town and met a bunch of the real people and then would feed ideas back to Melissa and Stephenie. When we did finish the final screenplay, Stephenie read it [and] she had some good notes, like details that were just in her head. ... It's been really a cool collaborative process."

Whether the film achieves the same kind of success as the book remains to be seen, though *Entertainment Weekly* has already predicted that it will be one of this fall's blockbusters. Rosenberg is confident that, like the novels themselves, the movie will appeal equally to adults. Why? Because she didn't write the screenplay with a specifically teenage audience in mind.

"I think the books are obviously appealing to teens, but the number of adults who are crazed over this might just equal the teen market as well," she notes. "And for me, I was writing it honestly for myself: myself as the audience. I loved the book, I was a huge fan, so I really wrote it with that in mind. What is entertaining to me? What do I want to see on the screen? ... I don't think at any one point I was younging it down."



Vicious Vamps: *A violent confrontation between Edward and James, and (above) Bella (Kristen Stewart) and Edward are* Twilight*'s star-crossed lovers.*



THE CREATOR OF SIX FEET UNDER BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO THE VAMPIRE GENRE WITH HBO'S *True Blood*

COMING OUT of the COFFIN

by Liisa Ladouceur

IF YOU GOT EXCITED BY THE billboards, banners and other online campaigns that popped up earlier this year for "Tru Blood: synthetic blood nourishment beverage," you no doubt have discovered by now that there's no new drink on the market that tastes like human blood. What you got instead is a new television show about vampires that doesn't suck.

As those ads so loudly crowed, *True Blood* is the latest HBO series from the creator of *Six Feet Under*, Alan Ball. Based on a book series by Charlaine Harris, the show deals with the "great revelation" that vampires walk among us and, thanks to synthetic blood invented by the Japanese, can co-exist with humans for the first time. Of course, that co-existence isn't necessarily peaceful. From the very first episode, the has show tackled issues of racism, homophobia and basic human rights all in the guise of a bloodsucker story.

"Alan absolutely wanted to create a show that isn't just about vampires, but about how vampires affect society and vampire blood affects society and how having them in our existence changes the way we are," explains British actor Stephen Moyer, who plays *True Blood*'s lead vampire, Bill Compton.

Compton is a 173-year-old vamp who returns to his hometown of Bon Temps, Louisiana and unexpectedly hooks up with a local waitress, Sookie Stackhouse (played by Anna Paquin), who has her own curse: telepathy. Through the eyes of Sookie's friends, family and neighbours, the show explores divergent points of view on the vampire coming out – from suspicious and hostile authorities to "fang banger" groupies.

Screening on HBO means *True Blood* doesn't have to play nice à la *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Although both series do star a pretty blonde with secret powers and a vamp boyfriend, they are very different beasts. Here, it's *Sopranos*-level sex, violence and swearing from the get-go. Granted, the R-rated fucking, talking about fucking and fucking violent behaviour hasn't been drenched in extreme blood and guts yet, but *True Blood* has its own pleasures.

"When you finally see a moment of sexual – how can I phrase this? – penetration, between Sookie and Bill, it takes your breath away," explains Moyer. "I wanted to go further with the blood but HBO pulled back on the gore. Because it's such a provocative image – a sharp tooth piercing a virginal neck, with the flowing of blood and all the sexual metaphors there – it's already assaulting on the senses."



"I'd like to think it's not similar to anything else in horror or television because Alan [Ball] isn't a Hammer fan, or a Nosferatu fan, he's his own entity."
Stephen Moyer, *True Blood*'s lead vampire

As with the Harris books, *True Blood*'s locale is a big part of its appeal. Set in the sweaty, swampy environs of the American South, it oozes gothic atmosphere that, with an obvious nod to Anne Rice's tales, brings much to the suspense and sexuality of the proceedings.

"There's a history in the South, a gothic attitude there in the rural settings," explains Southern-born Carrie Preston, who plays Arlene Fowler, one of Sookie's co-workers who is very much against the vampires. "I think it lends itself to mystery and things happening that you wouldn't expect. You always get the feeling that lurking behind trees there is something going on, that something ghostly has been there before. It's a place of strange and mysterious worlds."

In the canon of vamps on TV, *True Blood* follows nicely in the *Dark Shadows* of its greatest predecessor, with romanticism and soap opera love twists aplenty and a captivating, gentlemanly count. But it's Ball's trademark black humour that places *True Blood* squarely in line with contemporary programming, and even a chance for mainstream breakthrough. Viewers need not be well-versed in vampire mythology, either, for the show is establishing its own set of rules: yes, you must ask a vamp inside your home but no, they can't become bats or mist. They can "glamour" their victims into submission, and their blood is a cure-all drug and aphrodisiac. Some want to be human, while others prefer the underground.

Moyer, who grew up on Hammer films and previously played a vampire on the British TV series *Ultraviolet*, says *True Blood* is unlike any other realm of the undead, and suggests it might even expand to cover other creatures of the night.

"I'd like to think it's not similar to anything else in horror or television because Alan isn't a Hammer fan or a *Nosferatu* fan, he's his own entity. He's creating something that's fucking dark and goes pretty weird places and I don't think we've seen it on TV before."

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CREATURE FEATURES

BY ERIC VEILLETTE

EVERY GENERATION OF HORROR FILM FANS HAS A COMING-OF-AGE STORY.

Depending on how old you are, you might remember the day your dad brought a VCR into the living room, and how soon after you would spend your weekends scanning the horror sections of early 1980s video stores, all while carrying the rental tag for *Escape to Witch Mountain* because -- let's face it – your parents weren't going to let you see *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

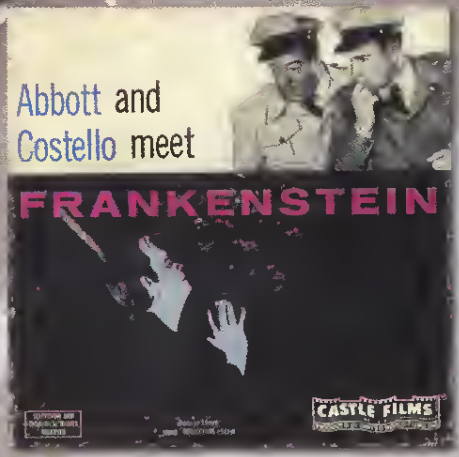
In this era of immediate accessibility to media, it's important to remember that before the '80s you couldn't just head to the video store and buy or rent a copy of the film you wanted to see.

"The concept of watching movies at home, anytime you wanted to, seemed like something H.G. Wells dreamed up," says Ted Okuda in his foreword to Scott MacGillivray's *Castle Films: A Hobbyist's Guide*.

Before the advent of home video, you had three options: 1) You could hope your local cinema would screen a favourite film of yours. 2) You could scan the *TV Guide* and hope *The Ghost of Frankenstein* would play on the late show. 3) If your family had an 8mm projector, you could pool your paper route money and get your mitts on a Castle Film. Offered in 8mm and later Super 8, these reels were an integral part of the pre-VHS home movie market.

Castle started out in the 1930s by offering newsreels, cartoons, travelogues and sports subjects, then began selling abridged versions of Hollywood productions after a merger with Universal in the 1940s. They achieved great success with their abridgments of films by Abbott & Costello and W.C. Fields, as well as westerns – all of them focusing on scenes of physical comedy and adventure.

These silent mini-movies (sound versions, which used the film's original score music, were introduced later as home projectors became equipped with audio) were offered in two formats: the "Complete Edition" of 200', with a running time of about twelve minutes, and a "Headline Edition," a glorified trailer showcasing the highlights of the longer edition, running around three minutes. The footage was edited into a sort of "digest," sometimes giving an overview of the entire film, and sometimes only focusing on a specific scene.









Abbreviated Terrors: *Castle Films' 8mm reels told short versions of tall tales*

In 1959, Castle reached a new milestone, as the release of an abridged version of *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein* tapped into the monstermania of the 1950s. By then the Universal Horror films from the '30s and '40s were undergoing a renaissance on syndicated television, and now kids could have an actual copy – albeit a severely shortened one – to watch in their living rooms.

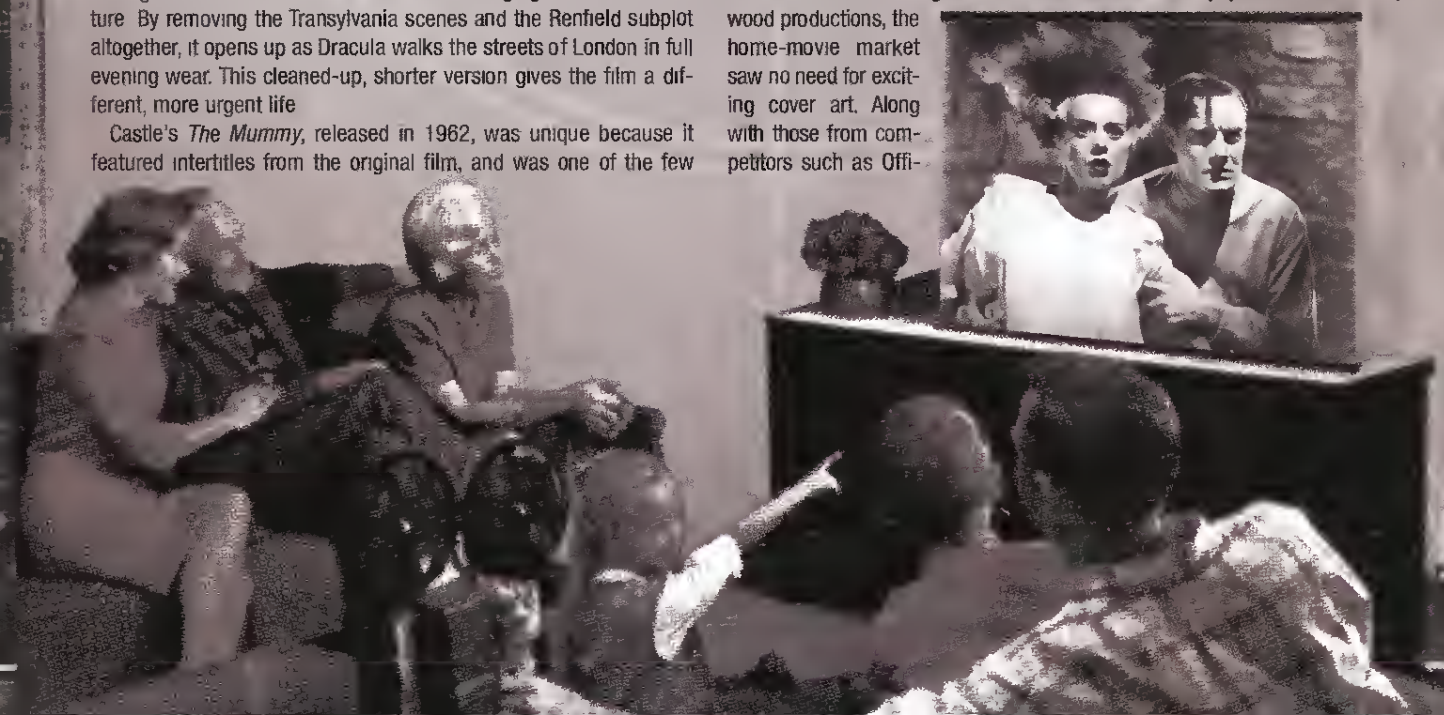
You found Castle Films in the camera section of your local Kresge's or K-Mart in revolving racks similar to those used to display newsstand comic books, but most horror fans of that era will remember their first exposure to Castle's horror films came from the back pages of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. John Landis has often cited *Famous Monsters* and those short digests as a major influence on him; Steven Spielberg even used dogfight footage from a WWII Castle film alongside scenes he shot at an airport in one of his early shorts, *Fighter Squad*.

So how did these films differ from their theatrical counterparts? The Castle version of *Frankenstein Meets The Wolf-Man* was edited to depict the two Cockney grave-robbers invading Larry Talbot's resting place, which leads to the climactic, castle-crumbling finale between the titular monsters. For Lugosi's *Dracula*, Castle's rendition managed to filter out much of the awkward staging found in the feature. By removing the Transylvania scenes and the Renfield subplot altogether, it opens up as Dracula walks the streets of London in full evening wear. This cleaned-up, shorter version gives the film a different, more urgent life.

Castle's *The Mummy*, released in 1962, was unique because it featured intertitles from the original film, and was one of the few instances in which the full cast was credited in a Castle Film. Unlike other Universal horrors, *The Mummy* contained an elaborate silent scene where Karloff's fate as Amon-Ra is staged in a fantastic pantomime. Much of the horror in the film lies in Karloff's expressionless face, motionless due to Jack Pierce's rigorous makeup application. His mummification scene results in one of the spookiest Castle Films ever released.

By the 1940s, monster movie plots had worn thin and many of the sequels were nothing but filler – a loose narrative with barely enough to keep the kids in their seats until the monster would strike. They also featured sound scores reused several times since *The Bride of Frankenstein*. Taking this into consideration, Castle understood how to market these films to fans: cut to the chase and include the good monster scenes. This was accomplished with careful editing. Cutting a 75-minute feature into twelve coherent minutes takes skill, and these editions aimed to highlight the excitement and thrills of the original films. Unfortunately, and most likely due to cost-saving measures, Castle adopted an early practice of not crediting the editors responsible for trimming the films down. *Castle Films: A Hobbyist's Guide* makes no mention of those involved except for company founder, Eugene Castle, who edited the films prior to the addition of the Universal catalogue.

Beyond the wonderfully edited products they offered, what really set Castle above the rest was the great box cover art. Until Castle popularized 8mm Hollywood productions, the home-movie market saw no need for exciting cover art. Along with those from competitors such as Offi-













Horrible Home Movies: A collection of reels from Castle Films

cial Films, most of the early releases had generic boxes, with the title printed on the bottom flap.

The majority of the images used for Castle cover art were renditions of movie stills using primary colours that were then affixed to brightly coloured backgrounds, including the aquamarine and pink used as a background on the box for *The Mummy's Ghost*. Exceptions to the rule were the nearly identical covers for *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *The Bride of Frankenstein*, the image for the latter portraying Glenn Strange as the Monster instead of Boris Karloff.

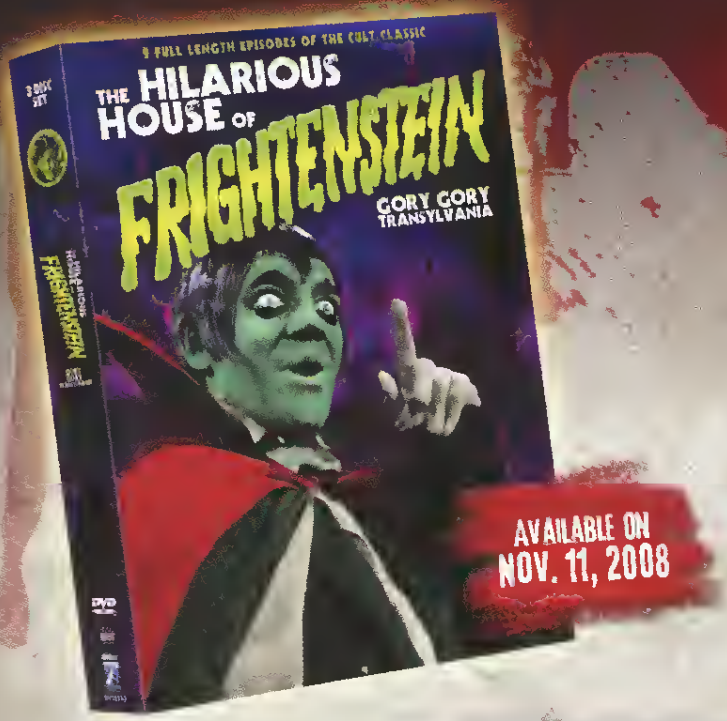
The Pulp Novelties company has released two volumes of 8mm cover art called *The Monster Box*. Packaged in actual reel boxes, the 25-card sets feature not only Castle's output, but also some from Ken Films, Republic and Columbia. While celebrating them all, they acknowledge that Castle went "that extra distance to create original, well-rendered illustrations." The sets do not feature any of the covers from Castle's successor, Universal 8, which revamped all the covers with a neon yellow background and a posterized still from the films.

Launched in April of 1977, Universal 8 went a little further with the post-Castle line, offering more sound editions, as well as 400' abridgments. It released a version of *The Raven*, as well as a 400' digest of the Frank Langella *Dracula*. The popularity and affordability of Super 8 sound projectors made it possible to use footage that would not have worked as a silent film, which is something many of Castle's competitors didn't get in the first place, the editors over at rival Ken Films would cut together a film using only scenes of dialogue, simply because they featured star of the movie – not very exciting when projected in your living room at your 10th birthday party.

So how collectible are the reels now? The earlier Castle reels – Stalin's 70th Birthday comes to mind – might be scarcer, but as a testament to their enduring popularity, all 30 Universal Horror digests were still in print when the 8mm market disappeared in the late '70s. They were produced by the tens of thousands, and many of them circulate the collector's market today. On eBay, mint condition reels in the original box such as *The Creature From the Black Lagoon* and *Pit and the Pendulum* list for around $200 apiece.

Collecting these silent 8mm reels might seem redundant today, since there are wonderfully restored versions of the original films on DVD. But Castle Films and their contemporaries produced a unique product of the time, worthy of the same respect their complete counterparts have earned. When DVDs became the standard, many people got rid of their VHS collections, but they were simply trading them in for something better, albeit the same. The Castle digest kept some people thinking about the next time they'd see the whole thing on the late show or at the local cinema, but to most, it was a satisfying viewing experience on its own. Here's hoping there's some parallel universe out there where K-Mart still sells them.

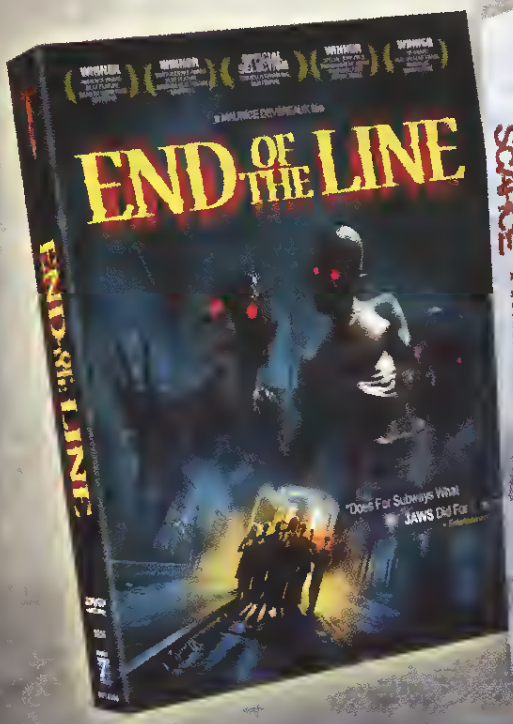
FRESH BLOOD FROM ANCHOR BAY

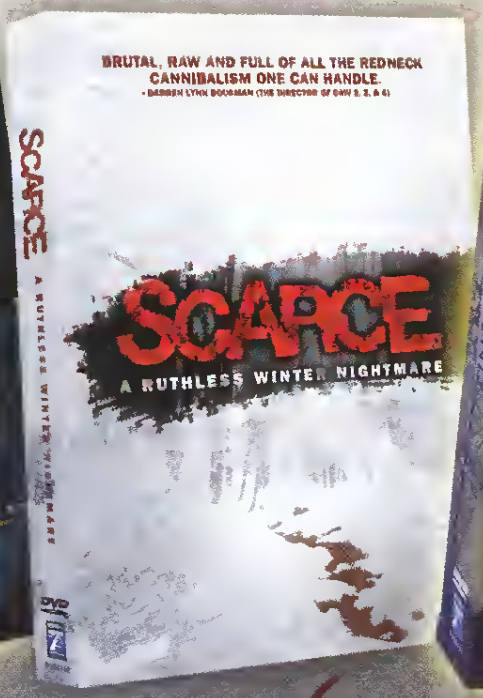


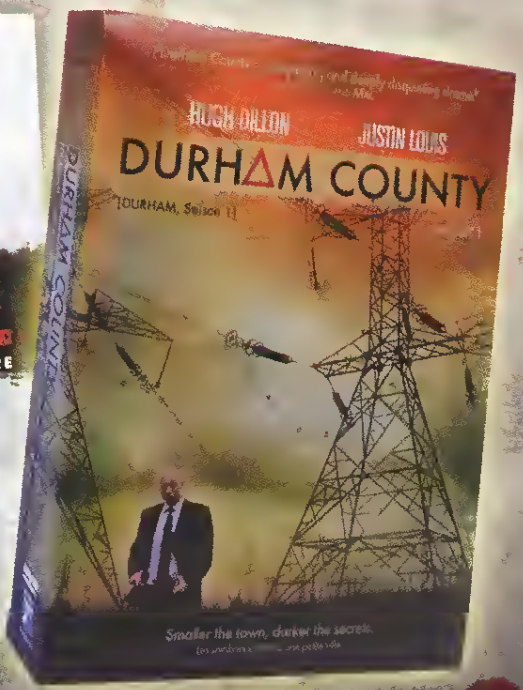
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ARTHUR BROWN, THE MADMAN WHO SHOVED SHOCK ROCK IN THE FACE OF THE PEACE AND LOVE GENERATION WITH HIS FIERY STAGE SHOWS AND OCCULT THEMES, CELEBRATES THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS MOST INFLUENTIAL ALBUM.

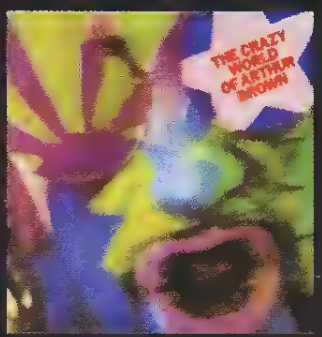
⛧ THE GOD OF HELLFIRE

by KIERLA JANISSE



IT'S NO SECRET THAT CROSS-POLLINATION EXISTS all over the musical map, but nowhere are the progenitors so clearly defined as in the history of shock rock. This lineage is widely acknowledged as beginning with Screamin' Jay Hawkins and his pet skull Henry in 1956; but although Screamin' Jay is the pioneer of theatrical performance in popular music, shock rock as we know it is more directly indebted to Arthur Brown. One can easily see how Genesis-era Peter Gabriel, David Bowie, Ozzy Osbourne, Alice Cooper, KISS and Marilyn Manson owe a debt to Brown and his wild vocal style, proto-corpsepaint and theatricality, in use as early as 1965.

The English singer, now 66, is even considered by many to be the father of all satanic rockers; his first single 1967's "The Oevil's Grip" – with backing band The Crazy World – directly inspired the sound and fury of early British metal bands such as Black Widow and Black Sabbath. "The Oevil's Grip" was a flop on the charts, but set the tone for the madness to come: creepy, organ-fuelled dirges, fire and brimstone theatrics, bizarre contraptions (including a crane used to drop him on stage) and pyrotechnics. In a world where The Beatles were still considered the most far-out thing imaginable, Arthur Brown signalled a musical apocalypse.



It's fitting, then, that he was born during an air raid. East End London, where he spent part of his childhood, was left scarred by blackouts and rampant fires caused by the German bombers. These early years, haunted by war and insecurity – combined with a love of Keats and Arthurian myth – would have an enormous impact on young Arthur. His psychedelic anthem "Fire" first materialized as "The Fire Poem" when he was still a schoolboy, and experiments with the destructive element would follow.

"My brother and I, at a very early age, decided to set fire to my grandfather's hair while he was asleep, to see if it would burn," Brown recalls. "It did, and he, poor man, woke in a great state of alarm."

This incident foreshadowed what would become an iconic image of the 1960s: Brown in a flaming headpiece, a metallic mask lifted to expose a face crusted black with woad and contoured greasepaint. Brown's signature chapeau was affixed precariously to his head, spawning more than a few accidents. Sometimes it was pure chaos.

"At the Windsor festival in 1967, I caught fire and was put out with pint glasses of beer," he says. "At one of the London clubs in 1968 I was wrapped in a fire-blanket to put me out, but I didn't stop the act, I kept on singing and dancing inside the blanket. A lot depended on the state of the person who was fuelling it and lighting it. I soon learned that whoever it was needed to be very much in a focused state, and not stoned or pissed!"

The doom-laden #1 hit "Fire" – wherein Brown coined the epithet "I am the God of Hellfire!" – accompanied his onstage histrionics. It was a seminal tune marshalling the forces of what would soon come to be known as heavy metal, with Brown the unofficial flag-bearer of the aesthetic. Of course, no one knew this at the time. One must remember that the musical climate in 1965, when Arthur's stage persona first appeared, was more "cool" than crazy. It was the most fertile period in British music, but most bands still aped the big four: The Beatles, The Stones, The Who and The Small Faces. There was a sound and a look that dominated pop culture. Says Brown of the era, "Acid and mind expansion had not yet arrived."

His concerts at the time conjured a media feeding frenzy. According to tribute website godofhellfire.co.uk, his friends described his stage show as

"the greatest single spectacle since the Rape of the Sabines."

The combination of Brown's frightening stage persona (if his makeup didn't scare you, his frequent disrobing was sure to) and unsettling lyrical preoccupations – including vampires, devils, fire and damnation – changed the way people experienced music. Gone were the simple songs about toys and girls; nothing could touch the occult head trip laid down in an Arthur Brown song, especially with the singer gyrating all over the stage like a man possessed. Brown was a contemporary of Britain's other early shock rocker Screamin' Lord Sutch, but even Sutch himself proffered that while he was a novelty gimmick, Brown was the real deal.

"I must shock," Brown protested in a 1968 interview, "When a boy comes onstage singing about the boy next door it's right that he should look like the boy next door. But when I go on singing about putting spells on people, and devils and gods and unseen forces, it's important that I look like a devil and can do the things I claim."

He made headlines starring as The Devil in a "black magic" movie called *Hex* in 1968, and that same year future horror director Peter Sykes (*Demons of the Mind*, *To the Devil...a Daughter*) cast The Crazy World of Arthur Brown band as the demented live act in his subversive morality tale *The Committee*.



Through all this, Brown became the darling of the emerging psych scene with his four-octave wailing voice, flailing onstage boogie and flagrant disregard for any type of authority. Arthur Brown was as punk rock as they came in those days, spitting on and hurling insults at an adoring audience, as well as getting arrested in various countries for routinely undressing onstage. He was a confrontational artist with the intellect to back up his bravura.



Photo by Chris Walter

Shock Rock Original: *Arthur Brown in 1967 -corpsepaint, and (opposite) his infamous stage show.*

> "WHEN I GO ON SINGING ABOUT PUTTING SPELLS ON PEOPLE, AND DEVILS AND GODS AND UNSEEN FORCES, IT'S IMPORTANT THAT I LOOK LIKE A DEVIL AND CAN DO THE THINGS I CLAIM."
> ARTHUR BROWN

In 1968, Track Records put out The Crazy World of Arthur Brown's first (eponymously titled) album, now considered to be among the first "concept" albums. The record told of a soul's transformation, traversing through confusion, purgation and hellfire, like a rock-opera of *Dante's Inferno*.

"The story of the album was a nightmare someone was having involving different deities," Arthur explains. "It was an attempt to show how both dark and light are necessary aspects of the mind's appreciation of reality; in other words, the daily mind can only really function in dualities. The dreamer goes down into hell, but is then granted a vision of heavenly energy. The God of Wisdom then guides him. At the end of Side One, we are still in the nightmare. The second side was meant to reconcile this and leave the dreamer with a vision of beauty, but the record company refused to put it out with that on the second side. So only two of the original pieces from the concept made it to side two: 'Spontaneous Apple Creation' and 'Child of my Kingdom.'"

This year marks *The Crazy World of Arthur Brown*'s 40th anniversary as a shock rock cornerstone, and Universal aims to reissue it before year-end (no firm date as of press time) with newly recorded bonus tracks that complete the disc's original concept.

Brown went on to form early-'70s prog incarnation Kingdom Come (whose stage show featured live crucifixions) and collaborated with Ash Ra Tempel's Klaus Schulz in the late '70s. He continues today as a solo artist playing with primordial concepts to create a demented psychedelic spectacle fuelled by psychofropics and religious mysticism. (In 2007 he released the album *The Voice of Love*.) In fact, Brown's barely suppressed dark side recalls filmmakers such as Donald Cammell (*Demon Seed*, *White of the Eye*) or Kenneth Anger (*Invocation of my Demon Brother*, *Lucifer Rising*), contemporaries of Brown whose journeys into the unknown realms of the psyche were similarly viewed with apprehension, as dangerous experiments.



While Brown has turned away from horror trappings in his music these days, his role as a catalyst for the early '70s British metal upsurge – with both Ozzy Osbourne and Bruce Dickinson citing him as a major inspiration for the emerging Midlands metal scene – must be respected. (In addition, he recently played a priest in a video for The Darkness.) His fervent spirituality has a strange relationship to his previously violent onstage persona, but he often held that summoning a terrifying image before the audience was a necessary evil that prompted questioning and change, often for the better. In a Belgian TV interview he was asked about his performances suggesting a misanthropic slant, to which he responded, "I like people – but like most people, I'm mad, you know?"

CINEMACABRE



The Zombie Diaries: Not as good as *[REC]*, but better than *Diary of the Dead*.

BEATING ROMERO

THE ZOMBIE DIARIES

Starring Russell Jones, Anna Blades and Imogen Church
Written and directed by Michael Bartlett and Kevin Gates
Dimension Extreme

Though completed in 2006, British-made *The Zombie Diaries* comes to North America in the wake of both *Diary of the Dead* and *[REC]*. The timing is a shame because as a result, this zombie mockumentary already seems like a rehash, even though it was actually completed first. While the movie is far too inconsistent to match the unrelenting suspense of *[REC]*, it is at least better than the overblown *Diary of the Dead*, and when first-time filmmakers can beat George A. Romero at his own game, that's certainly an achievement.



Co-writers/directors Michael Bartlett and Kevin Gates focus on a group of documentary filmmakers working on a project about the British public's bored response to a growing zombie epidemic. The poignant opening scenes humorously explore the disinterest most people have towards world events, but these clever sequences soon give way to a series of poorly written clichés, as the protagonists awkwardly explain the concept of a zombie holocaust and get trapped in a farmhouse.

Both the writers and actors struggle through this necessary set-up, but once these requisite scenes are complete, the film actually becomes quite an effective little horror story told through out-of-order video diary segments that eventually dovetail into a genuinely chilling finale.

Of course, the key to any zombie movie is the zombies themselves; the filmmakers definitely deliver here with a collection of believable living corpses that follow all the established genre rules. The faux-documentary approach is also handled well, creating a feeling of immediacy that enlivens some of the otherwise tired scares. Taken on its own terms, *The Zombie Diaries* works. The filmmaking is accomplished, the cast is talented and the social commentary is subtle (except for an embarrassing direct-to-camera monologue comparing the events of the film to 9/11). The only real problem is familiarity. With so many new zombie films kicking around, there's really nothing unique about *The Zombie Diaries*. Everything here is done reasonably well, but it has all been seen before.

Philip Brown

FROM A TO ZOMBIE

HALLOWEEN: 3-DISC UNRATED DIRECTOR'S EDITION

Starring Malcolm McDowell, Sheri Moon Zombie and Tyler Mane
Written and directed by Rob Zombie
Dimension

Rob Zombie's *Halloween* was greeted with a fair bit of disdain from the horror community – just the kind of reaction that you'd expect when any director puts his mitts all over such an iconic film. Still, judging by the box office receipts, there were more than a few of you willing to give it a chance. Evidently, someone at Dimension even thinks it warrants a three-disc unrated director's edition.

Zombie's *Halloween* already received the unrated two-disc treatment last year, and much of the content from that release makes up this set. For those of you unfamiliar with the uncut version, the key differences include a new mental hospital escape set-up for Myers (centred around a typically lewd Zombie rape scene) and the revelation that Dr. Loomis lives after Myers seemed to finish him off in the theatrical version's climax. Otherwise, most of the restored footage is the expected meaningless dialogue, formerly deleted to help the movie's pacing. You'll have to listen to the director's commentary to pick out most of the subtle differences, and luckily Zombie's track is a winner, as he's quick to point out all of the added footage and always explains why it did not make it into the theatrical cut.

Disc two mirrors that of last year's DVD set. The key goodies here are several deleted scenes, as well as the alternate "work print" ending that was leaked online before the movie originally hit theaters – all with direc-

tor commentary. Most of these scenes are dull filler cut for obvious reasons, hut it's cool to see the guest cameos that didn't make it in, including Adrienne Barbeau and Calico Cooper (Alice's daugbter) The altemate ending is an obvious dud, as Myers is abruptly gunned down by the police instead of stalking Laurie, thus robbing him of his "boogeyman" persona and Laurie of her heroine status There's a whack of other features, including some damn funny bloopers of a foul-moutbed Malcolm McDowell, an FX featurette on creating the Myers mask, a lengthy doc on the making-of process and audition sessions by the actors

If all that still isn't enough, disc three contains *Michael Lives*, a more than four-hour-long(!!!) behind-the-scenes documentary that covers every fricking thing from scouting locations to the movie's day-by-day shooting schedule. Zombie's attention to detail is commendable, hut does anyone bonestly love this movie enough to sit through something this long?

Aaron Von Lupton

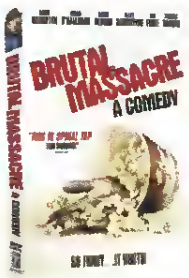


More Myers: *Like last year's two-disc unrated edition, but with an extra disc*

YES TO NAUGHTON

BRUTAL MASSACRE — A COMEDY

Starring David Naughton, Brian O'Halloran and Gerry Bednob
Written and directed by Stevan Mena
Anchor Bay



Assemhling a cast of B-grade horror royalty, writer/director Stevan Mena (*Malevolence*) orchestrates a comeback for fictional horror auteur Harry Penderecki in this hilarious mockumentary in the vein of *This is Spinal Tap*

Penderecki (played to hapless perfection hy David Naughton: *American Werewolf in London*) has seen better days. Once a horror legend with a string of hits including The Fish Who Ate Flesh, Sasquatch at the Mall, Killer Koala and I'll Take the Ring Back and the Finger Too, he has fallen out of favour with Hollywood and is determined to make a comeback with what he believes to be his ultimate masterpiece: Brutal Massacre. Assembling a loyal crew of incurable specialists, with documentarians in tow, Penderecki sets out to overcome the odds and reaffirm his stature as one of horror's elite

Much like the films of writer/director Christopher Guest (*Best in Show*, *A Mighty Wind*), *Brutal Massacre* masterfully takes dry, deadpan awkwardness and combines it with sidesplitting sight gags to explore the pitfalls of a subculture that is both familiar and mysterious. Co-starring Brian O'Halloran (*Clerks*) as the hungling assistant director, Ellen Sandweiss (*Evil Dead*) as the devoted, cut-throat production manager, Ken Foree (*Dawn of the Dead*) as a sensitive grip, Gerry Bednoh (*The 40-Year-Old Virgin*) as the short-fused director of photography and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*'s Gunnar Hansen as a crazed, foul-mouthed location contact, Mena finds gold in getting horror's old hands to flex their comedic muscles while putting comedy vets in horrific situations.

No doubt partially inspired hy the likes of Troma head honcho Lloyd Kaufman (and anyone else who's ever tried to make an indie horror film), Naughton really steals the show – exhihiting that same squirm-inducing lack of self-awareness that is every hit as hilarious, tragic and entertaining as Steve Carell's similar riff on TV's *The Office*. His turn as Penderecki, amidst a script ripe with razor-sharp filmmaking satire, should solidify *Brutal Massacre* as an instantly quotable classic.

And if you don't believe me, well, as Hansen's character Crenshaw says, "I don't give a fuck! Do whatever the fuck you want!"

Trevor Tuminski

KILLER QUIRKS

HOME SICK

Starring Tiffany Shepis, Tom Towles and Bill Moseley
Directed by Adam Wingard
Written by E.L. Katz
Synapse

There's a thank you to *Rue Morgue* in the end credits of *Home Sick* that presents an intriguing dilemma – is a positive review of this film automatically suspect, or conversely, is a negative review unexpected? Does a mixed review appear to be a compromise? Oh, dear…

Home Sick is a decidedly quirky slasher film In the opening scene, a man interrupts two young ladies getting it on in a motel room and kicks one out before leaving to buy a pack of cigarettes. He returns to find a bathtub full of gore and takes a knife in the back of the head à la the first scene in Lucio Fulci's *House by the Cemetery*.

Earlier that same evening, Mark (Forrest Pitts), his girlfriend Claire (Lindley Evans) and Mark's funeral home co-worker Robert (Will Akers) visit Tim (Matt Lero) and Candice (Tiffany Shepis). Their social call takes a turn for the uncomfortable when Mr. Suitcase (Bill Moseley) crashes the party and asks everyone to name the person they hate, while slashing his arm with razors taken from the suitcase-full he carries around. Bosses, ex-boyfriends and drug-dealing neighbours are reluctantly given up, except hy Tim, who calls out the room. When those named begin meeting grisly ends at the hands of a bondage-masked killer, the doomed party-goers, along with Tim's perpetually wired friend Devin (Brandon Carroll), visit Tim's paranoid gun-nut father (Tom Towles) to arm themselves for the inevitable third act showdown



Unfortunately, the cast proves to he too much of a good thing Moseley and Towles are criminally neglected character actors who stepped away from their convention tables to shoot what are little more than cameos here, despite heing top-hilled. Shepis enjoys a little more screen-time, delightfully wiggling her way through a turn as a slutty cokehead. Against genre vet-



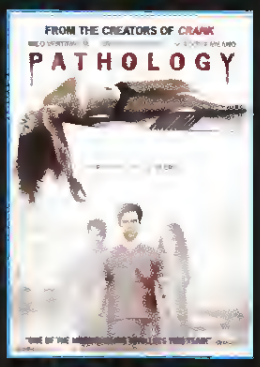
MALPRACTITIONERS

PATHOLOGY

Starring Milo Ventimiglia, Michael Weston
and Lauren Lee Smith
Directed by Marc Schölerman
Written by Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor
Seville

Most of us have had enough encounters with the medical establishment to know that the Hippocratic Oath often comes with a certain amount of hypocrisy; doctors are sworn to heal, but, let's face it, there's a reason why malpractice insurance exists.

Pathology is a nasty little medical thriller that does an effective job of showing how having the power of life and death can corrupt even the most virtuous. Milo Ventimiglia (TV's *Heroes*) stars as Ben Grey, a brilliant young doctor accepted into a prestigious pathology internship. Ben seems to have it all: a beautiful fiancée, rich in-laws and a high-profile job waiting for him after graduation. But our golden boy is fascinated by the after-hours exploits of his fellow interns. Led by the mercurial and manic Dr. Jake Gallo (Michael Weston), Ben's colleagues play a deadly game: devising and executing the perfect murder, then challenging each other to determine the cause of death. At first, their victims are irredeemable – murderers, pedophiles, scum – but soon enough they target anyone, simply because they can. Ben, clinging by a thread to his morality, soon finds his perfect life crumbling in a haze of sex, drugs and death. That his corruption will hurt those he loves most is inevitable.



Screenwriters Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, the writing/directing team responsible for the gleefully over-the-top action movie *Crank*, indulge a similarly dark vein of humour here, crafting scenes where our anti-heroes fuck beside corpses, perform autopsies upon the living and use needles as foreplay. Fortunately, director Marc Schölerman reins in their crafty insanity enough to make *Pathology* not simply an exercise in exploitation but a relatively thought-provoking treatise on the ease with which someone – anyone, really – can abandon their morals at the first whiff of superiority.

Neveldine and Taylor's script contains few truly original ideas. That Ben and Jake are mirror images of one another goes back at least to Jekyll and Hyde, while the implicit superiority of Ben and his fellow pathologists is straight out of Ayn Rand. But their twisting of tropes is more than enough to make *Pathology* a sick 'n' pretty piece of entertainment.

Sean Plummer

FENDER HELLBENDER

FIVE ACROSS THE EYES

Starring Veronica Garcia, Jennifer Barnett
and Danielle Lilley
Directed by Greg Swinson and Ryan Thiessen
Written by Marshall Hicks and Greg Swinson
Seville

Lost on the primitive back roads of Tennessee after a high school football game, good girl Stephanie (Jennifer Barnett) insists to her four minivan mates: "This is America, we have maps, everything is charted out." Watching the average contemporary American horror movie, with its recycled plot, generically beautiful actors and tired MTV visuals, you'd have to agree with her assessment – the predictable, mapped-out Hollywood formula rules. Then a film like *Five Across the Eyes* comes along to remind us that some truly scary characters still call the Land of the Free home.

The film's plot is as simple as its super low-tech aesthetic: five girls on their way home from a football game ding another car in the parking lot of a store where they've stopped to ask for directions. Much realistic bickering ensues as the girls barrel away from the scene of the relatively harmless crime – bickering that turns to hysteria when they realize the dinged car is in hot in pursuit. A few wrong turns later the girls are forced to confront their deranged pursuer. Mayhem ensues.

The story may sound familiar, but from the opening shot first-time directors Greg Swinson and Ryan Thiessen establish a level of claustrophobic realism that, by the film's end, may leave you wondering if you've watched erans of this calibre, the rest of the cast hold their own, but with everyone doing their best to be oddball, the result is a cacophony of eccentric characters that would make David Lynch blush. This disconnect is exacerbated by a surreal cinematographic backdrop of fades, smash cuts and slow-motion bits. And minus two more points for having people really puke on camera! [*Don't be such a prude, Gore-met! – Ed.*]

That said, the gore is class and consistent – especially a show-stopping fist-through-skull gag – and the original incidental music by Zombi is fantastic. Synapse Films, which also produced this film, has put together another excellent DVD, with extras including a commentary track with Wingard and Katz, a deleted opening scene, an on-set interview with Moseley, a manic featurette in which the director rants and raves about the production and three excellent shorts by Wingard and writer/producer Katz.

Home Sick is offbeat and bloody; now if it only had a beat you could dance to.

The Gore-met



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MAKES JACK A DULL BOY...





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~Bloody Disgusting

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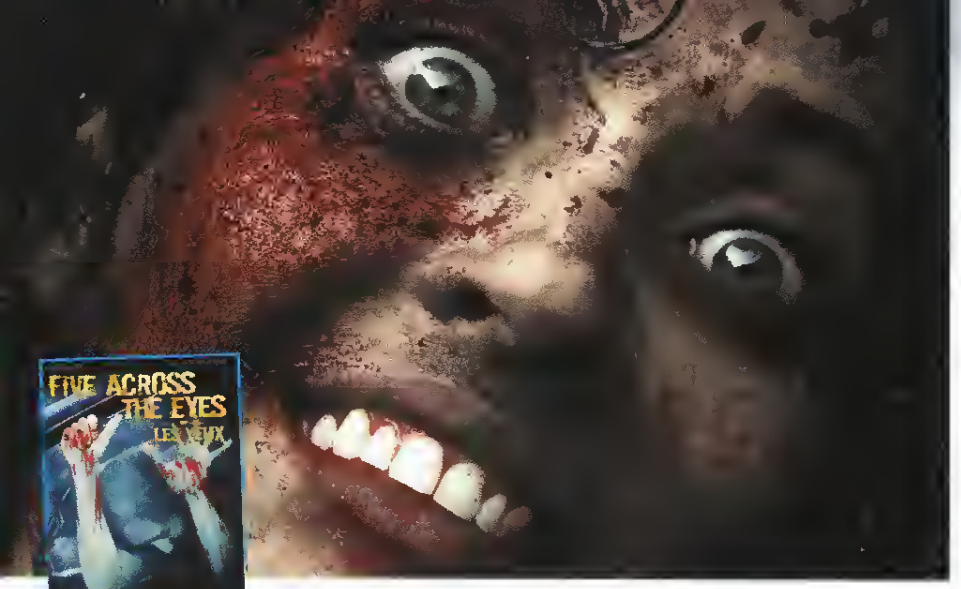
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Not your average contemporary American horror movie

an extended YouTube video the authorities will have removed by the end of the day. The directors pull this off by casting non-professional actors who actually look and talk like awkward teenagers, then giving them realistic dialogue and fairly complex relationships to work with. The real verité coup, though, is the camera positioning and pacing. Swinson and Thiessen force the viewer to sit in the van with the girls for the whole movie, and the action, which gets increasingly psychotic with every confrontation, takes place in real time. We join the girls at 10:30pm and leave them around midnight, about the same duration as the film's running time.

The acting is uneven in spots and you could find a few plot holes in the script if you looked closely, but why let that ruin the scariest night in the Tennessee backwoods since Ash and his buddies played one party game too many with the dreaded Necronomicon?

James Grainger

MANSONITE MAYHEM

GIMME SKELTER

Starring Mark Chavez, Kurly Tlapoyawa and Gunnar Hansen
Written and directed by Scott Phillips
Burning Paradise



It was 1968 when Charles Manson predicted social turmoil was going to turn America inside out, adopting the Beatles' "Helter Skelter" as his mantra for what he believed to be a necessary, impending chaos. Forty years later, writer/director Scott Phillips has revisited the violent vibe of those times to birth *Gimme Skelter*, a hilarious, bloody valentine to the gritty drive-in films of the '70s.

As a scuzzy gang leader claiming to be the son of Charles Manson – along with his "family" of bloodthirsty misfits – gets primed to orchestrate a kill-crazy rampage on an unsuspecting small town, it's business as usual for the New Mexico townsfolk. Funny, conversational dialogue, colourful character development and quirky details worked into seemingly mundane situations set a simple stage that leads up to the big night. It works to enrich what could otherwise have been an unoriginal retelling of the usual slaughterhouse kills and thrills. Phillips has infused *Gimme Skelter* with more heart than that and, as a writer, delivers wry, unexpected, fork-tongued humour that'll have you laughing out loud. Killer strippers, milk-fed cheerleaders, another comedic turn from Gunnar Hansen as a chatty single father (also see *Brutal Massacre – A Comedy*), and virtually every woman in the film going topless at some point – what else could you ask for? How about the gang continuing in the "family business" as they rack up an impeccable death toll of up-close-and-personal stabbings that get bloodier as the night wears on!

It's backed by a wickedly fuzzy soundtrack cut up to really serve the film, and includes the "bloodgrass" of Angry Johnny and the Killbillies, the acidic desert punk of Spindrift and the undead '50s retro-ska-rock of Zombina and the Skeletones. *Gimme Skelter* is an unpolished indie gem that taps into the bleary-eyed bedlam of the late '60s and somehow successfully adds a laugh track – such a feat is no mistake or instance of chance. Phillips is an up-and-coming writer/director with a raw vision deserving of greater exposure and bigger budgets. Gimme more.

Trevor Tuminski

SAW... WITH CLASS!

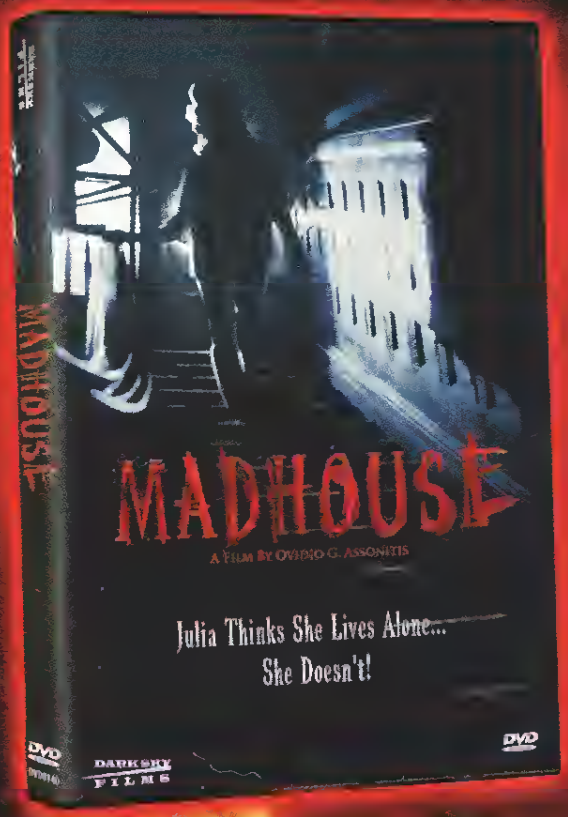
THE KILLING GENE

Starring Stellan Skarsgård, Melissa George and Selma Blair
Directed by Tom Shankland
Written by Clive Bradley
Dimension Extreme

How much pain could you endure before you kill someone you love? That's the crux of *The Killing Gene*, a sharp, smart horror film that takes the choice-and-consequences theme of the *Saw* franchise and classes it up tenfold







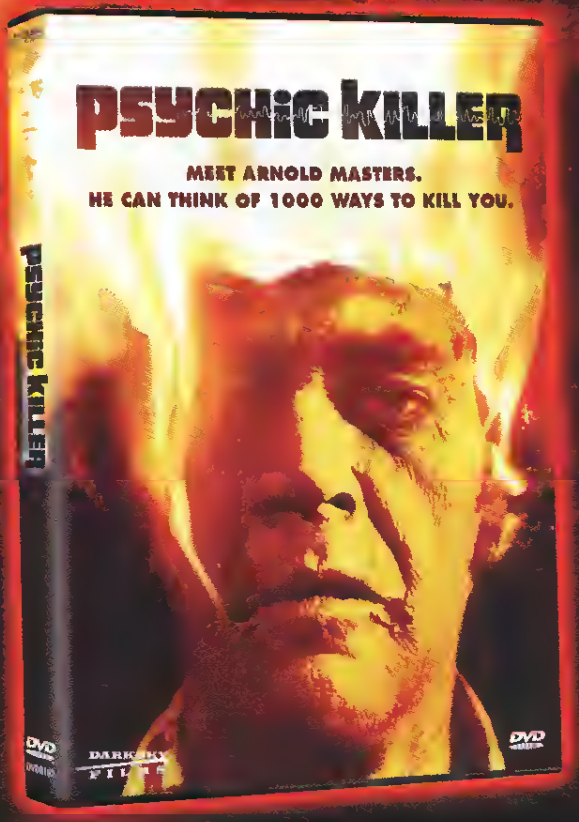
MADHOUSE

JULIA THINKS SHE LIVES ALONE.. SHE DOESN'T!

Julia's hideously deformed twin sister Mary escapes the local asylum and soon the bodies of Julia's friends and students surface around her. But is Mary the real killer?

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- Available for the first time on DVD. Uncut and uncensored





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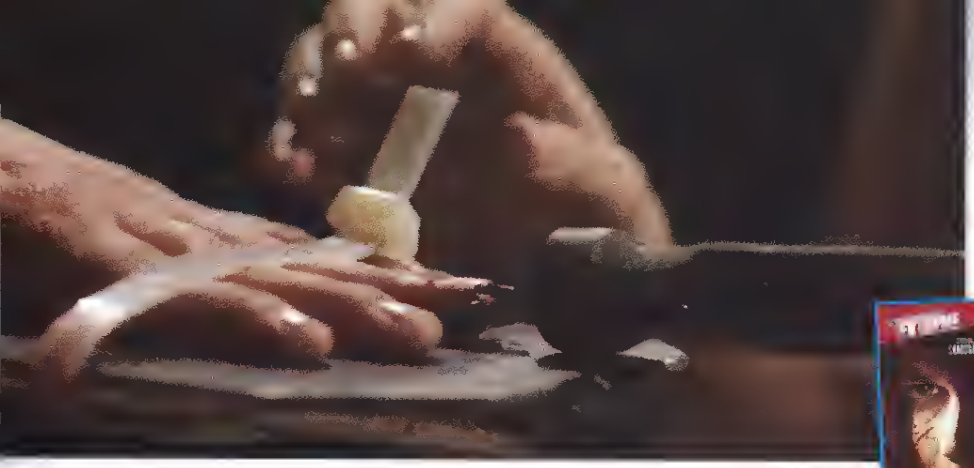
After being wrongfully convicted of murder, Arnold Masters is sent to a mental institution where he devotes his time to mastering the voodoo art of astral projection and remote control revenge.

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The Killing Gene: *A smart horror film that takes the choice-and-consequences theme seriously*

with an esteemed cast and greater moral depth

Stellan Skarsgård (*Exorcist: The Beginning*) plays Eddie Argo, a grizzled veteran cop who's got some questionable liaisons and a dirty secret. With the help of his rookie partner Helen Westcott (Melissa George: *30 Days of Night*), Argo leads an investigation into a string of serial murders involving electrocutions, chest carvings, grisly hangings and traces of animal tranquilizers. As a pattern develops and the killer's calling cards are slowly decoded, Eddie and his old partner (John Sbarian, *The Machinist*) seem to know more than they're letting on.

Smelling a cover-up, Helen sniffs around a precinct so crooked it would make Serpico throw in the towel. She discovers the victims are all linked to a gang of thugs who were allegedly responsible for a lurid mother/daughter rape and murder but got off, in a case that was headed up by Argo. The daughter (Selma Blair: *Hellboy*) is still alive and could be seeking retribution, but is a meek, sad-eyed animal behavior student really capable of carrying out a horrific real-life human genetic experiment?

Artfully directed and exquisitely acted, *The Killing Gene* is among the upper echelon of straight-to-DVD releases. Though Blair plays a woman scorned with as much icy vulnerability as anyone and George continues to pick her projects wisely, Skarsgård leaves little doubt that this is his movie. Looking like ten pounds of shit in a five-pound bag, his dishevelled appearance and boisterous scenery chewing are a tour-de-force akin to Orson Welles' similar turn in *Touch of Evil*. Still, not even Welles has stood as naked as Skarsgård does in the final act.

Not unlike the story itself, which revolves around genetic code and the application of formulas in the field, there's a doctrine at work here. Start with a visceral story, put it in the mouths of actors who can bear down onto the material, add competent direction, and, lo and behold, the result is a great movie that will make you wonder how much pain you could take.

Trevor Tuminski

LESS THAN CAPTIVATING

DUNGEON GIRL

Starring Wendi Jean Linn, Gunther Ziegler and Gwen Trevathan
Written and directed by Ulli Lommel
Lionsgate

Reality is supposed to be stranger than fiction, not more boring, but someone forgot to tell Ulli Lommel. A long-time collaborator of the late Wemer Fassbinder, Lommel has been directing poorly received horror movies for almost three decades now, and has spent the last few years churning out poorly received true crime films, including movies about the Zodiac Killer, Robert Pickton and the Black Dahlia murder.

His latest, *Dungeon Girl*, is a fictionalized account of the abduction and captivity of Natascha Kampusch, the Austrian girl who was kidnapped by Wolfgang Priklopil in 1998 and spent eight years in a tiny cellar under his garage before escaping in 2006. By the same token, watching *Dungeon Girl* feels like being held captive for years. Newcomer (read: amateur) Wendi Jean Linn plays Natascha proxy Schatze Melnick, while Austrian actor Günther Ziegler plays the unnamed stranger. They exchange little dialogue, with actress Gwen Trevathan narrating Schatze's inner monologue, much of which consists of ruminations on whether she deserves to be imprisoned in the cellar. (Schatze's father committed suicide when she was a child and her Bible-toting captor constantly tells her that all women are witches, so her self-esteem isn't exactly high.)

That Linn doesn't speak much is probably a good thing, as her face doesn't seem capable of registering emotion, although she may simply be numbed by Lommel's purple prose. Ziegler fares slightly better as the tormented stranger, but still must suffer the indignity of our watching him repeatedly molest a doll while nude. Nice butt, though.



The amateur hour (and 21 mins) extends to Lommel's direction and style, which consists of black and white flashbacks to Schatze's childhood, slow-motion dream sequences and multiple shots of our victim staring into space. The music (by the Green River Band) is equally off-putting, alternating between sappy piano during the domestic scenes (Schatze grows to love her stranger, so they have picnics and play badminton) and



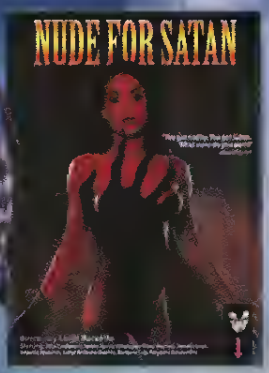


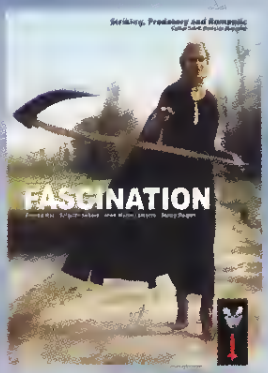
BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

REDEMPTION

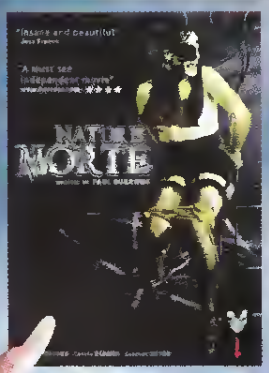
THIS WINTER, AS THE NIGHTS GET DARKER AND THE CRIES OF ANGUISHED WALL STREET TRADERS ECHO THROUGH THE EVENING AIR, PREPARE TO LOOSE YOUR MORALS ALONG WITH YOUR SOUL BY WATCHING SOME TRULY DECADENT CINEMA FROM REDEMPTION FILMS: PURVEYORS OF TOP CLASS SEX AND HORROR MOVIES SINCE 1993.









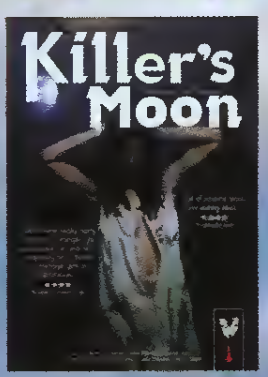






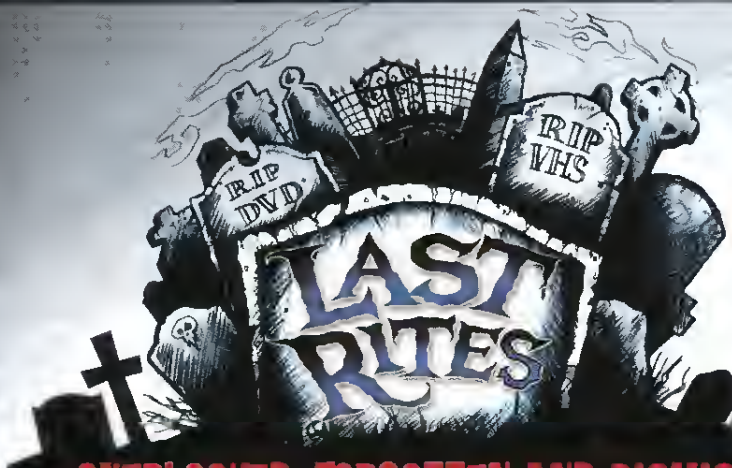






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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE ROTS ON THE RANGE

RIDERS OF THE WORM

UNDEAD OR ALIVE

Image



Ravenous and *Uninvited* aside, we're seldom treated to the fusion of the horror and western genres; and it's even rarer to see one that's a zombie comedy to boot! When a deserter from the US Army (James Denton) teams up with a lovesick cowboy (Chris Kattan) to break out of a prison lorded over by a corrupt sheriff, they're caught up in a zombie epidemic and have to run for their lives from a hungry undead posse. With an explosive soundtrack featuring psychobilly tunes from Three Bad Jacks and Slick Pelt, *Undead or Alive* succeeds on many levels – the gore is plentiful and well executed, the dialogue hilarious and the performances first-rate. As far as zom-com-westerns go, you could certainly do a whole lot worse, y'all.

Body Count: 37
Zombie Cowboys: 31

TWO SPURS IN THE GRAVE

THE QUICK AND THE UNDEAD

Cinram



Playing out like a post-apocalyptic western, *The Quick and the Undead* is set nearly a century after a zombie plague has decimated Earth, and follows a group of hired guns who travel from town to town killing zombies and collecting the bounty. But these cowpokes have traded horses for motorcycles and sometimes use cordless drills instead of six-shooters to perforate deadites. The idea of giving a western a Romero-esque edge is compelling, but first-time director Gerald Nott mishandles the film by relying far too much on lead character Ryn Baskin's (Clint Glenn) attempts to emulate Clint Eastwood. Though the body count is high, both the action and the zombies are boring, and there's far too much scenery chewing, where there should be brain-munching. Yawn.

Body Count: 32
Zombie Cowboys: 7

THE GOOD, THE DEAD AND THE UGLY

GHOST GUNFIGHTER

BCI



Filmed in 1995 for about the price of a Big Mac, *Ghost Gunfighter* (a.k.a. *Last Chance and High Tomb*) tells the tale of six college friends stranded in an old west ghost town after their car breaks down in the desert. As they try to leave, they're attacked by a zombie gunfighter who has risen from the grave. Not only is the title of this movie baffling, as the dead cowboy is not a ghost at all, but it takes a bizarre turn when it's discovered that the ghost town is really an abandoned movie set where an actor went nuts and killed a bunch of people back in the 1930s. This convoluted mixture of horrible acting, shitty sound and confusing plotlines tested even my limits!

Body Count: 14
Zombie Cowboys: 1

Last Chance Lance

atonal synth drones during the darker passages (i.e. the doll fucking)

No doubt Lommel thinks he's made an art film with *Dungeon Girl*, but don't be fooled, he's simply proven that even a version of the truth can hurt.

Sean Plummer

THE BUGS ARE BACK

STARSHIP TROOPERS 3: MARAUDERS

Starring Casper Van Dien, Jolene Blalock and Amanda Donohoe
Written and directed by Edward Neumeier
Sony



In 1997 Paul Verhoeven turned Robert Heinlein's science fiction masterpiece *Starship Troopers* into a blockbuster intergalactic bug hunt picture. Along with amazing CGI insect battles, the film also managed to cleverly and humorously convey an anti-Fascist message. Despite its meagre box office take, *Starship Troopers* went on to become a bona fide cult classic. Not surprisingly, it spawned an immediately forgettable sequel that regrettably has ultra-cheap visual effects in which the bugs look like people.

Now there's *Starship Troopers 3: Marauder*, and are you ever in for a surprise. Casper Van Dien reprises his role as John Rico from the 1997 original after wisely skipping the previous installment. Joining him is a cast of cannon fodder, including Amanda Donohoe, who plays a scheming admiral, and Jolene Blalock as a hard-ass starship captain.

Unlike *Starship Troopers 2*, this is not a no-budget movie. Sure, there are plenty of tragically bad visuals, most of which feature poorly animated bugs and killer robots, but some of the shots are so slick that you're momentarily fooled into thinking it's a big Hollywood feature. Exploding heads? Awesome!

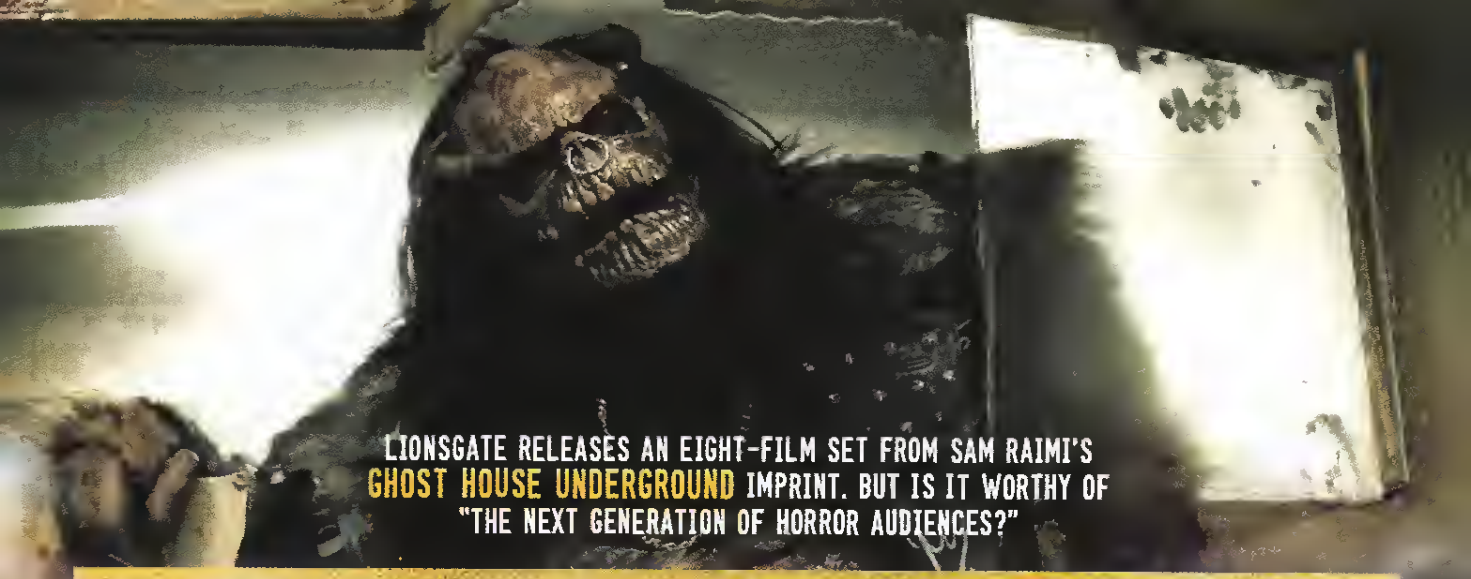
Like the first film, *Marauders* also appears to have some amusing social commentary, primarily a light subtext that seems to be taking the piss out of conservative Christianity. Then, without warning, right at the climax, the movie careens into an obscene display of rampant American fundamentalism, transforming all the "amusing commentary" into a serious statement. Lead characters fall to their knees praying for salvation and are miraculously rescued. The forces of the Federation declare, "God is on our side!" Cue a montage of crucifix-shaped barrels blasting bugs that would make Dante weep with joy.

Fundamentalist propaganda is sickening on its own, but this direct-to-DVD picture also endorses the Fascism that Verhoeven tried to mock. The apparent moral of this story? Unthinking obedience is "what God wants." Now that's scary.

Nick Gray


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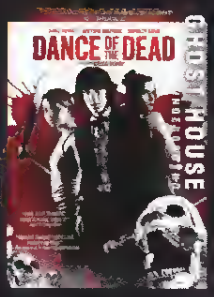
LIONSGATE RELEASES AN EIGHT-FILM SET FROM SAM RAIMI'S GHOST HOUSE UNDERGROUND IMPRINT. BUT IS IT WORTHY OF "THE NEXT GENERATION OF HORROR AUDIENCES?"

GHOST HOUSE EXORCIZED

BY JASON LAPEYRE

DANCE OF THE DEAD

Directed by Gregg Bishop
Written by Joe Ballarini



One of the few bright spots in this dismal collection is yet another entry in the tired zombie-comedy subgenre, but this one beats the odds and is actually terrifically entertaining. The first half-hour plays out like an episode of *90210*, and there are few indications that the film will be anything special, but once the zombies make their appearance *Dance of the Dead* breaks out some razor-sharp writing, hilarious characters and truly disgusting gore.

The characters are broken up into two groups – those who could get dates to the big high school prom and those who couldn't. When the giant nuclear power plant next to the town seeps waste into the local graveyard, zombie mayhem overcomes the peaceful hamlet, converging on the prom. The dateless losers sitting at home are best positioned to save the rest of the school, and they rise to the occasion.

By no means does *Dance of the Dead* break any new ground, but overall it's entertaining, filled with memorable, likeable characters (the gym teacher alone is classic) and easily worth 90 minutes of your time.

ROOM 205

Directed by Martin Barnewitz
Written by Jannik Tai Mosholt



Many of the films in this set suffer from the same disease: good cinematography, good performances, terrible script. Maybe that's the theme of Ghost House Underground? "For the next generation of horror audiences -- movies made from the first drafts of scripts!" Okay, Jannik Tai Mosholt's script for the Danish film *Room 205* isn't really all that bad, it's just thin and derivative.

A beautiful young woman, Katrine (Neel Rønholt), moves into a university dorm and makes an enemy of popular Sanne (Julie Ølgaard), who tries to frighten Katrine by telling her about the ghost that haunts her room. When the ghost is set free, nobody will believe Kathne until the bodies start piling up and there's the eventual showdown.

As mentioned, the film is technically accomplished, with beautiful photography, a nostalgic, sun-dappled atmosphere and good performances. It's definitely a European movie, with a languid pace and infrequent scares for the first two-thirds, but the final twenty minutes are plenty gory, with a great eyeball/shard-of-mirror moment. All in all though, director Martin Barnewitz would be well advised to seek a more polished story next time.

LAST HOUSE IN THE WOODS

Written and directed by Gabriele Albanesi



Okay. Start talking, Raimi. What were you thinking? Are you trying to maintain some kind of *Evil Dead* street rep by including this cheap splatterfest clunker? This is truly scraping the bottom of the barrel. There are probably several of these disposable European rape-fantasy/cannibal movies made every year, so what made this one so "next generation" that it just had to be included in Ghost House Underground?

The plot leapfrogs around haphazardly, but has something to do with a woman who is saved from a rapist by a gun-toting family man, who takes her and her injured boyfriend back to his house, where he attempts to feed her to his family of ravenous cannibals. By utter coincidence the rapist who had tried to assault her earlier stumbles upon the house and then becomes the hero who tries to save her. My lord, do the Italians have some misogyny issues.

Acting, script, photography, gore – it's all bad. It doesn't help that the whole movie takes place in the dark. No fun whatsoever.

NO MAN'S LAND: THE RISE OF THE REEKER

Written and directed by Dave Payne



This one gets off to a great start with a hilarious and shocking opening sequence, but unfortunately can't keep up the momentum and soon dissolves into a mess. Technically, it's one of the better films in the collection, and the performances are a notch above most of the other entries. But once again the script is so full of holes, so reliant on cliché and constructed so heavily on top of cardboard characters that it just collapses under the slightest weight of audience expectation.

Bringing back The Reeker, a kind of servant of death who carries out atrocities towards humans in the moments before they die, this sequel is about a small-

town Texas sheriff and his son trying to arrest a gang of bank robbers on their way to Mexico. The Reeker soon pays the group a visit and changes all their plans.

The film has decent gore but the script is just so backwater-dumb that there's nothing to grab onto as a viewer. There isn't even a main character, as far as I could tell. It's also strangely derivative of *No Country for Old Men*, without being one-tenth as watchable.

TRACKMAN

Directed by Igor Shavlak
Written by Valery Krechetov and Viktor Sorokin

Next up is a Russian movie that tries to fuse the crime genre with horror, kind of a *Reservoir Dogs*-meets-*The Descent*. An admirable aim, which only leaves me with one question: how do you say "epic fail" in Russian?



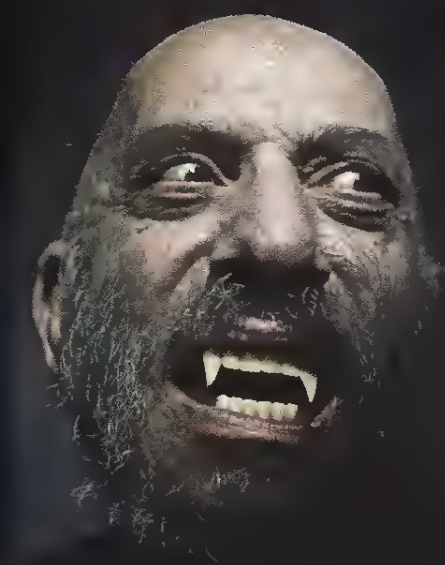
A gang of criminals rob a bank, then disappear into a network of tunnels under the city, sealing the entrance so the cops can't follow as they escape through a little-known exit miles away. Unfortunately, the tunnel is inhabited by a deformed mutant known as the Trackman. From the clichéd bank robbery that starts the film to the clichéd monster in the tunnels to the clichéd group-turning-on-itself, the film eventually becomes a metaphor for the very experience of watching it. I felt lost, groping through the darkness, praying for the light that would come when it finally ended.

Once again, the film looked great, but the "monster" is almost never visible, there's way too much screaming and nothing happens that you weren't expecting.

BROTHERHOOD OF BLOOD

Written and directed by Michael Roesch and Peter Scheerer

This one's best described as "porno-esque" – some seriously low-budget-ass filmmaking is on display here. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but cheapness just oozes out of every frame of this thing, from the styrofoam props to the flaccid performances to the absolutely laughable plastic vampire teeth.









A Messy House: *(clockwise from top)* ***No Man's Land, Dance of the Dead, Last House in the Woods,*** *(below)* *Sid Haig in* ***Brotherhood of Blood*** *and (opposite)* ***Dark Floors***

A gang of down-on-their-luck vampire hunters stumble onto a conspiracy to bring the devil himself back from hell to rule over the vampires of the world. I suppose you can defend it by saying there's a certain level of fun to the whole movie, but revelling in your own crapulence is not a substitute for quality entertainment. The press release calls it a "claustrophobic thriller," which is definitely code for every scene being shot in someone's apartment or basement.



Despite the Rob Zombie pedigree that co-stars Sid Haig (as Pashek, Vampire King!) and Ken Foree bring to *Brotherhood of Blood*, it's just no good, even if it is slightly, sorta fun.

DARK FLOORS

Directed by Pete Riski
Written by Pekka Lehtosaari

This is a strange one. GWAR-esque Finnish metal band Lordi won the Eurovision song contest in 2006 and now they've made a movie, with the members of the band playing monsters. It is according to some sources, also the most expensive Finnish film ever made. Hmm. Interesting.

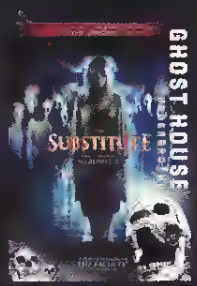


The movie begins well enough, with an autistic girl having a brain scan in a hospital. The scan goes awry, and the girl's father attempts to take her home. They get on an elevator with a nurse, a security guard and a businessman; when the doors open again, the hospital is deserted and they are being hunted by CGI ghosts and Finnish metal band members!

Yes, it's that silly. It makes a decent attempt to be atmospheric, but man, once that first CGI ghost hits the screen, it's pretty hard to keep from laughing. The characters are all such stock players – the sympathetic nurse, the asshole businessman, the kind-hearted security guard – it's like the cast from *Dawn of the Dead* were airlifted into this vanity project and left without a script.

THE SUBSTITUTE

Directed by Ole Bornedal
Written by Ole Bornedal and Henrik Prip



One of only two movies in this set (along with *Dance of the Dead*) that can really be called "good," *The Substitute* boasts a clever story, some creepy effects and a fantastic sense of humour.

A grade six class in Denmark has a substitute teacher foisted on them when their regular teacher gets salmonella. The new teacher is plainly evil, humiliating the children and making them endure a battery of bizarre tests, but none of the parents will believe what all the children know is true – that the substitute is an alien bent on using the kids for her nefarious extraterrestrial purposes.

It's entertaining, it's smart, it's well-acted and it's a fair and honest depiction of what it's like to be twelve, something rarely seen in any movie. While it's a bit of a stretch to call this horror, it's a breath of fresh air after the rest of this box set, although its inclusion just makes the title choices for Ghost House Underground seem even more haphazard and random, and ultimately lowers the value of having Raimi's name on the majority of these films.

Recommend this set? Not a you-know-what of a chance.

CINEMACABRE PRESENTS

ABBREVIATED TERRORS

REVIEWS BY PHILIP BROWN, JAMES BURRELL AND JAMES CHANGER



PENNY DREADFUL

cinemaimages.net

30 mins.

With slightly higher production values and a cheesy celebrity cameo, *Penny Dreadful* could easily have been a great episode of *Tales From the Crypt*. That's a compliment, as it's a contemporary haunted house story with a surprisingly effective twist ending. As an indie short, it still works pretty damn well, however. Though obviously limited by time and budget, the movie is incredibly well crafted with some impressively moody cinematography, effectively staged suspense sequences and a handful of great scares.

The story is very simple and traditional – a young couple inherits a large house that comes with a multi-million dollar inheritance tax and a collection of ghosts – but that's kind of the point. Writer/director Bryan Norton starts with expected genre conventions then toys with them just enough to make them feel new. That's not to say that his film is perfect. Parts of the script feel rushed to keep the running time down and most of the acting is either wooden or played for the rafters. But these are fairly common challenges for shorts. At the very least, *Penny Dreadful* pushes enough of the right buttons to be a strong calling card that will hopefully score the filmmaker a feature. **PB**

HIS LAST REQUEST

hislastrequest.com

27 mins.



In what's surely a warning to dirty old men everywhere, Eurohorror cult figure Jack Taylor (*Succubus, Pieces, Autopsy*) resurfaces in this short as The Father, an elderly, womanizing bastard with a final request. Nearing the end of his time on Earth, he has the opportunity to have his last wish realized when a sultry young woman (Iris Diaz) answers an ad for a live-in nurse. Tensions arise between her and the man's adult daughter (Carmen Vadillo), but the old-timer – guided by his ageless libido – insists on keeping the mysteriously seductive woman around. Later, when he asks her to fulfill his final desire, she agrees to do it/him… for a price.

The Madrid-shot *His Last Request* (*Ùltimo deseo*), starts off on a lighthearted note but soon moves into dark territory, culminating in a shocking and unexpected ending. Briskly paced and strikingly shot in black and white, this offering from writer/director Simon Birrell takes the novel approach of presenting itself in the form of a 1920s silent movie, complete with either English or Spanish title cards.

Highly entertaining, it's a sensual, bloody, unsettling little gem of a film, which will bring to mind the age-old adage, "Be careful what you ask for." **JB**



IN THE WALL

blacklight-pictures.com

22 mins.

On the hottest New Year's Eve in memory, long-suffering and very pregnant Jonelle – played by scream queen Misty Mundae/Erin Brown – trudges up a few flights of stairs with a bag of groceries to find her good for nothing hubby Chris slouched in front of the TV. Chris never asked her to get pregnant, he reminds her, and only an extended guilt trip gets him off the couch long enough to assemble the pieces of a crib that have been sitting in the living room.

Director Mike Williamson's gritty dissection of a typical domestic hell takes a turn for the gruesome, though, when Chris accidentally murders Jonelle with a hammer, forcing him to hide her pregnant body in one of the apartment's walls. From there we're thrust into Edgar Allan Poe territory as Chris tries to get on with his life while ignoring the scratching noises coming from behind the plaster.

Williamson paces his claustrophobic tale with admirable restraint, and he sets up a surprising number of BOO! shots before delivering an over-the-top finale which may, admittedly, not be to all tastes. Still, everything here should have you wondering what Williamson could pull off in a full-length feature. **JG**



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CARMILLA
THE LESBIAN VAMPIRE

AVAILABLE: 11.04.08

When young heroine Jenna Fontaine falls victim to a strange vampiric plague, causing all sorts of wild hallucinations, she takes off with her father Travis to seek out and eradicate the source of the vile infection,which lies within a vampire baroness named Carmilla.

Their destination is Carmilla's hometown, where the apocalyptic horror began - and where Jenna and Travis are to meet their friend The General. Banding together, they'll have their only opportunity to destroy Carmilla.

But Carmilla has other plans for Jenna, and by the time they get to the town, they will find themselves facing off against Catholic schoolgirl zombies, cannibals, demon nuns and the ferocious vampire locked in Travis's own trunk! All while Carmilla is slowly seducing Jenna's body and soul.



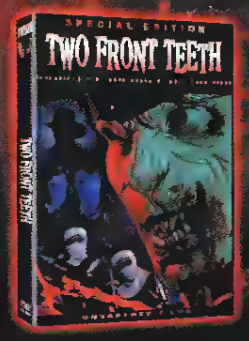
SPECIAL FEATURES:
- Director & Producer's Commentary
- The Gore Girls' Commentary
- Making of *Carmilla* Documentary
- Outtakes
- Brinke Stevens Interview
- "Heads Are Gonna Roll" Short Film With Commentary
- "Sex and Death: 1977" Short Film
- A Conversation with the Cinematographer of "Sex & Death"
- Photo Gallery
- Trailers

TWO FRONT TEETH

AVAILABLE: 11.25.08

It's the night before Christmas and Gabe Snow, a tabloid writer haunted by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, is investigating a Yule Tide conspiracy.

Gabe knows that Flight 1225 was brought down one foggy Christmas Eve by a flying creature with a "glowing nose". As a result, the blood-sucking vampire, Santa Claus, has put Gabe on his list and unleashed the demonic fury of the North Pole. An army of zombie elves, who have no interest in toys, pointy hats or dentistry, are about to turn Gabe's white Christmas blood red.



Sometimes... Christmas Bites.

SPECIAL FEATURES:
Director's Commentary
Behind the Scenes Featurette

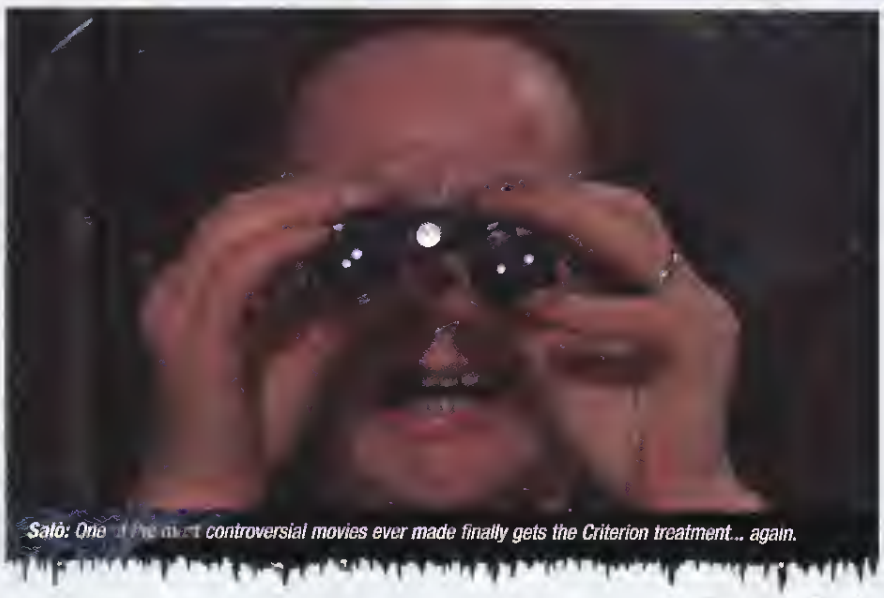


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REISSUES



Salò: One of the most controversial movies ever made finally gets the Criterion treatment... again.

PASOLINI'S PUTREFACTION

SALÒ, OR THE 120 DAYS OF SODOM (1976)

Starring Paolo Bonacelli, Giorgio Cataldi and Umberto P. Quintavalle
Written and directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini
Criterion

In 1998 the initial Criterion DVD release of *Salò, or The 120 days of Sodom* quickly became "the rarest DVD in the world" after it was pulled from store shelves due to licensing issues. Collectors were willing to pay upwards of 500 dollars for an authentic "white-ringed" copy of the disc. Fuelling the inflated prices was the notoriety of the film, considered by many to be perverse pornography and the most offensive film ever committed to celluloid. At present, *Salò* is still banned in many countries.



Controversial Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini based *Salò* on Marquis de Sade's treatise on sadism, *120 Days of Sodom*. Written almost 200 years earlier while de Sade was imprisoned in the Bastille, the text is little more than a catalogue of sado-masochist fetish and sexual torture. Pasolini updates the novel by setting his film in the Italian Republic of Salò around the time of the decline of fascism in Italy. The story focuses on the exploits of four libertine fascists (including one played by Paolo Bonacelli from *The Stendhal Syndrome*) who kidnap children to satisfy their sadistic fantasies. The men enlist two seasoned prostitutes to aid and entertain them with stories. Fuelled by the evening's tales of sexual degradation, the men indulge themselves as they partake in rape, sodomy, incest, coprophilia, ritualistic mutilations and, finally, murder.

Watching *Salò* is to swim in the vile murk of the darkest of humanity's obsessions. The film really is as disturbing as its reputation. There can be only two reactions to it: a need to simply shut it off and try to forget it, or to play the voyeur and watch with shocked curiosity. Yet *Salò* is not an extreme example of torture porn, nor is it exploitation. If nothing else, the viewer is left with a feeling that they have endured Pasolini's vision for a reason and perhaps there is something masterful behind this. Indeed the film is filled with metaphor and allegory, as repeat viewing reveals (though for many once is enough). And it is a beautifully photographed work and rather tastefully fashioned in spite of all the horrors it presents.

This new Criterion Collection edition also includes documentaries and essays to help audiences understand the film, something missing from the original DVD. Pasolini, who was murdered by a male prostitute shortly after *Salò*'s release, saw it as a metaphor for the global commercialization of innocence. If only he'd been around to see the hot commodity that it's become....

Jason Pichonsky

DARK? MORE LIKE "DORK"

DARK FORCES (1980)

Starring Robert Powell, David Hemmings and Carmen Duncan
Directed by Simon Wincer
Written by Everett De Roche
Synapse



Retitled to give it a darker edge, this 1980 fantasy film originally went under the decidedly poncey moniker *Harlequin*. Now, it's back with a butch new name and scary DVD art, trying to pass itself off as a "supernatural thriller." It's a retelling of the Rasputin story, about an eccentric healer who wields influence over a politically powerful family, upending the artifice their lives are built on. Whether this strange new figure is a con man or truly supernatural is left hanging in the air until the film's final moments, when the truth is revealed, and you, the audience, say "Oh," then turn it off and throw the DVD in the garbage.

Part of the film's problem is its lack of narrative drive. I felt like I was watching '70s television a lot of the time. The story just plods along, with no sense of tension or excitement or even a clear declaration of what's at stake. Gregory Wolfe (Robert Powell) just shows up at the Rast residence one day (Rast backwards? Get it?) and miraculously makes their son, who has leukemia, start feeling better. Wolfe then worms his way into Sandra Rast's (Carmen Duncan) trust, and soon she tells him that her marriage is a sham. On the other side of the coin is Nick Rast (David Hemmings), a prominent politician whose strings are being pulled by Doc Wheelan (Broderick Crawford) and an assortment of cronies, all of whom are out to disprove Wolfe's supernatural abilities so his power over the family will end. They try to convince Rast that Wolfe is a spy sent to kill him, and forge all kinds of incriminating evidence to contradict Wolfe's demonstrations of his power.

Robert Powell is somewhat charismatic as Wolfe (who wouldn't be, playing Rasputin?), but the general dullness of the other leads and the script ultimately overwhelms him. Plus, there's little that places the film in the horror genre. Synapse is trying to pass this off as something other than a lifeless, fantasy-tinged domestic drama. Avoid.

Jason Lapeyre

LOST SCOOBY-DOO EPISODE?

BELPHÉGOR, PHANTOM OF THE LOUVRE (2001)

Starring Sophie Marceau, Frédéric Diefenthal and Julie Christie
Directed by Jean-Paul Salomé
Written by Jérôme Tonnerre, Jean-Paul Salomé and Danièle Thompson
Lionsgate



Lisa (Sophie Marceau) is possessed by a spirit that escapes from a mummy in this campy but entertaining film

"Belphégor is the Devil… he is Lucifer when he takes on a body!" When I heard that line, accompanied by exotically creepy music, in the trailer for this French film, my kitsch-loving side immediately took notice.

In the picture, said to be the first production filmed within the world famous Louvre museum (or to be more correct, *Musée du Louvre*), a vengeful spirit escapes from a mummy unearthed from storage during renovations. Taking possession of a young woman named Lisa (the stunning Sophie Marceau), the spirit uses her body to steal ancient artifacts that will allow it to travel to the afterworld. Of course, anyone who tries to stop her is met with injury or death, and it's up to Lisa's boyfriend (Frédéric Diefenthal), a retired police inspector (Michel Serrault) and a renowned Egyptologist (Julie Christie) to put an end to the ghastly events.

Based on one of France's most beloved tales of terror and suspense, *Belphégor* originated in a 1927 novel written by prolific French author, journalist and playwright Arthur Bernède (interestingly enough, a friend and business associate to *The Phantom of the Opera* creator, Gaston Leroux). The story was adapted several times over the years, first as a 1927 serial, then as an enormously successful 1965 French television miniseries and comic strip and later as an early-'90s animated TV series.

Strikingly photographed and making great use of the museum and other distinctive Parisian locations, the film suffers from a script that descends into camp a little too often, not to mention some pretty corny dialogue. Despite this, the presence of the Academy Award-winning Christie adds a touch of class, plus there's that awesome score by award-winning composer Bruno Coulais (*The Crimson Rivers*).

The film is presented in French with subtitles, but regretfully there are no extras on this reissue (though the original 2002 release from Columbia/Tristar-TVA International featured trailers and a making-of featurette). Even though *Belphégor, Phantom of the Louvre* doesn't hold many true scares, it's still filled with enough fun and creepy moments to make it enjoyable.

James Burrell

STARK RAVING BOWEN

THE DEAD PIT (1989)

Starring Cheryl Lawson, Stephen Gregory Foster and Jeremy Slate
Directed by Brett Leonard
Written by Brett Leonard and Gimel Everett
Code Red

It may strike you as frivolous to begin a DVD review by whining about the cover design, but my concerns are significant. *The Dead Pit*'s original VHS box cover had a button you could push that would make the zombie's eyes light up and he'd go "Urr!" It was way cool, and while this reissue sports the same artwork, the endearing gimmicks are absent.

That aside, *The Dead Pit* is a fun, cheap-ass little gore flick, and if it doesn't quite equal some of the 1980s cult favourites it seems to channel – *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, *Re-Animator*, *From Beyond* and *Bad Dreams*, for starters – it's still likely to push some nostalgia buttons. Cheryl Lawson and her rack star as Jane Doe, an amnesiac admitted to a mental hospital that's… well, pretty fucking mental, populated by every kind of hysterical, raving psychiatric patient stereotype that ever raised the ire of advocacy groups.

Things get even zanier when an earthquake unleashes the spirit of evil Dr. Ramzi (Danny Gochnauer), murdered and buried in the building's basement twenty years earlier. Jane is plagued by terrifying visions of things to come but can't get anyone to believe her because, after all, she's a mental patient. Cue murders, mutilations, gratuitous toplessness, that kind of totally unmotivated, crazy-ass lighting you only get in low-budget '80s horror and, eventually, a full-on zombie attack – don't ask why, just enjoy.



Fortunately, Jane finds an ally in an ex-army demolitions specialist (British actor Gregory Foster), who has the film's two coolest lines: "For dead people, they sure are smart!" and "They've got brains in their mouths!" (Ever notice how an English accent can lend credibility to even the most brain-damaged individual? Stuart F. Andrews has been milking that for years.)

This uncut reissue looks and sounds decent (given the source material), and its features include a commentary track and four on-camera interviews. We haven't always been kind to Code Red, but between *The Dead Pit* and *The Unseen* (*RM#83*), things are looking way up.

John W. Bowen





NEW ON DVD: A QUARTET OF HAMMER STUDIO CLASSICS FROM THE 1960s.

THE BOX THAT DRIPPED BLOOD

BY JAMES BURRELL

FANS OF CLASSIC SILVER SCREEN HORROR ARE NO doubt in a state of bliss right now thanks to the DVD release of several hard-to-find films from those masters of gothic terror, Hammer Films. *Icons of Horror 3* (from Sony) is a new two-disc collection of four fright fests from the famed British studio. Presented in widescreen format, these remastered and uncut UK versions feature original trailers but unfortunately little else in the way of bonus features. Despite this, the set still makes for an essential addition for fans of the legendary studio.

THE TWO FACES OF DR. JEKYLL (1960)

Directed by Terence Fisher
Written by Wolf Mankowitz

In this sexy, rather adult variation of the classic Robert Louis Stevenson story, Dr. Jekyll (Paul Massie) is a bearded, older, unattractive scientist, while his dual personality, Mr. Hyde, is a young, handsome, suave charmer with an evil streak, who thinks nothing of unleashing his cruel (not to mention kinky) impulses.

Helmed with finesse by the studio's most prolific director, Terence Fisher, the film is boosted greatly by the performance of co-star Christopher Lee (in perhaps his most salacious role) as Jekyll's seemingly best friend, who has an affair with the doctor's sexually neglected wife, Kitty (the lovely Dawn Adams). Though it drags in a few spots, *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* is a seldom seen gem, and a clever, welcome deviation from the standard Jekyll and Hyde tale.

THE CURSE OF THE MUMMY'S TOMB (1964)

Directed by Michael Carreras
Written by Michael Carreras (as Henry Younger)

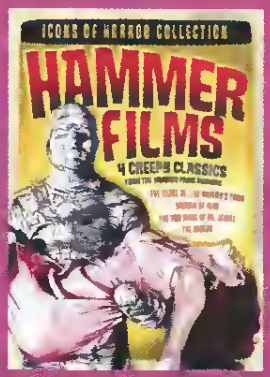
When three Egyptologists discover the tomb of the Prince Ra-Antef, American entrepreneur and financial backer of the expedition Alexander King (Fred Clark) demands the sarcophagus and accompanying treasures be shipped back to England so they may be put on tour. Upon arrival, the mummy (played Dickie Owen) is resurrected and unleashed upon the streets of London – on a quest to kill those responsible for robbing the tomb.

Although beautifully shot and infused with atmosphere, *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* does suffer from wooden performances by leads Terence Morgan and Jeanne Roland and the fact that the titular threat does not show up until late in the film. However, props go to a lively performance by Clark as the P.T. Barnum-like huckster King, and to some pretty nifty, gory special effects.

SCREAM OF FEAR (1961)

Directed by Seth Holt
Written by Jimmy Sangster

Often referred to as one of Hammer's "mini-Hitchcocks," *Scream of Fear* (known as *Taste of Fear* in the UK) is the only non-gothic period film of this lot. It tells the tale of a wheelchair-bound young woman (Susan Strasberg) who, after nearly drowning, returns to her father's estate on the French Riviera only to be informed by her stepmother that dad's away on business. Before long, the vulnerable young woman begins to see the man's corpse on the grounds of the house, leading her to question her own sanity.



A stylish, atmospheric and suspenseful psychological thriller with slight shades of *Les Diaboliques*, *Scream of Fear* is well written, tautly edited and features some truly goosebump-inducing black-and-white cinematography. Throw in a performance by Christopher Lee (in a small, but interesting role as the girl's doctor) and you can't go wrong with this one.

THE GORGON (1964)

Directed by Terence Fisher
Written by John Gilling

The most anticipated film of the set for many Hammer fans is this sumptuously eerie gothic fairy tale about a tiny European village held in the grip of terror by the reincarnation of the Greek mythological monster The Gorgon, whose snake-covered head would turn her victims to stone. Starring (in a rare reversal of roles) genre icons Peter Cushing as the villain and Christopher Lee on the side of good, the film is also graced by the presence of Barbara Shelley, as a woman with a connection to the snake-haired fiend.

Gorgeously photographed in blues and greens, *The Gorgon* remains one of Hammer's most beautiful productions. A strikingly haunted score by Hammer musical maestro James Bernard adds much to the proceedings, as does Bernard Robinson's magnificent sets. Even The Gorgon's makeup effects (although not without flaws), have resulted in what has since become an iconic movie monster.

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DALI ON A DIME

THE MASK (1961)

Starring Paul Stevens, Anne Collings and Norman Ettlinger
Directed by Julian Roffman
Written by Franklin Delessert, Sandy Haver, Frank Taubes, et. al
Cheezy Flicks



Surreal imagery from one of the film's three 3-D sequences



The first bona fide horror film to emerge from Canada, director Julian Roffman's unique movie spookshow *The Mask* unfolds in a series of interactive anaglyphic nightmares unlike anything on the big screen in that era. Despite its somewhat outdated 3-D gimmick, this surreal psychological thriller was distinctly ahead of its time, and still makes a strong impression.

Originally produced by Roffman and Nat Taylor, a Toronto-based film exhibitor and publisher determined to crack the American market, *The Mask* was the first Canadian film to secure US distribution (through Warner Brothers). Since then, the film's surreal sequences have helped it blossom into a respected cult hit, and it was immortalized on the cover of RE/Search's indispensable reference book *Incredibly Strange Films*.

In *The Mask*, psychiatrist Dr. Barnes (Paul Stevens) treats a museum employee who claims that an ancient Aztec ritual mask is driving him to kill women. Barnes dismisses his claims until the patient mails him the mysterious artifact before committing suicide. Curious, the good doctor puts on the skull-like mask and is transported to a densely foggy dreamscape where he's assaulted by macabre visions, including skulls, fireballs and snakes. Convinced the mask can bring out the repressed desires of anyone who wears it, Barnes arranges for a series of supervised experiments under the watchful eye of his former professor (Norman Ettlinger). But as Barnes' obsession with the mask grows, his subconscious predilection towards lust and violence bubbles over to real life and he attacks his pretty young secretary (Anne Collings).

The film's genius lies in the William Castle-like showmanship that accompanied it. Audience members were presented with their own "Magic Mystic Mask," a cardboard placard with built-in 3-D glasses that they donned whenever Barnes hears the ominous phrase, "Put the mask on now!" Joining the doctor, viewers then sat back to take in the film's parade of phantasmagoric imagery – equal parts waking nightmare and carnival sideshow hurnhug.

The Mask's two distinct worlds – Barnes' real-life descent into madness and the stylish hallucinatory freak-outs – couldn't be more at odds. The scenes of the doctor lusting after his secretary while denying his drug-like dependence on the mask are stiffly acted on shabby, claustrophobic sets, but the film comes completely alive for the three highly atmospheric 3-D dream sequences. Although credited to effects artist and montage editor Slavko Vorkapich, Roffman and his crew actually handled these scenes after Vorkapich's ideas proved too costly.

Encompassed by sheets of fog and expressive lighting, these sequences always begin as Barnes imagines himself as his dead patient in an unfamiliar world. He wanders through vast cave-like sets, watching a young sacrificial virgin attacked by hooded mutants and a ragged ghoul paddle a coffin down a river. There's no dialogue at all when Barnes retreats into the deep recesses of his psyche – instead, the terror is heightened by a wonderful, pulsating electronic score by Louis Applebaum, a Toronto-born musician who also conducted the beatnik jazz freak-outs for Roffman's previous film, *The Bloody Brood*.

It's clearly Dali on a dime, but these crazed and surreal dreams were a huge step forward from the self-conscious use of 3-D in *House of Wax* and *It Came from Outer Space*. Working independently of the main plot thread, these scenes are pure effects-driven delights for fans of the bizarre, highlighting the pure spectacle of the technology that wouldn't be topped until 1981's *Comin' at Ya!*, which kicked off the 3-D boom of the 1980s by throwing anything and everything at viewers just for the hell of it.

Originally released on VHS as part of Rhino Video's short-lived line of 3-D tapes, *The Mask* has been difficult to find in recent years until this new release by Cheezy Flicks.

Keeping the all-important 3-D scenes intact, this DVD includes a pair of 3-D glasses allowing you to experience every creepy delight of this distinctive, groundbreaking film. *The Mask* remains an important stepping stone for both the Canadian film industry and 3-D technology, and should be seen by anyone with even a passing interest in either.

Paul Corupe



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IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

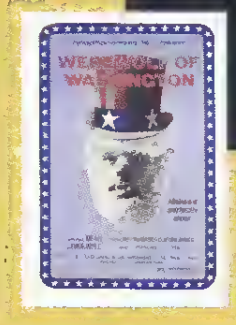
R DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

PRESIDENT EVIL

by John W. Bowen



Howl to the chief, bay-beh! On November 4 our southern neighbours will elect a President who, whether Republican or Democrat, probably won't cause a national epidemic of butt-clenching by saying "nuke-u-lar" or "misunderestimated" on CNN. Hence it is with affection and respect for our American friends – not to mention the land of my birth – that I devote November's column to the convulsively funny and sadly overlooked *The Werewolf of Washington* (1974).



We kick off with a title-crawl voice-over from our protagonist Jack Whittier (Dean Stockwell): "Maybe you remember my byline – I was the youngest member of the Washington press corps, before so much blood passed under those pretty Potomac bridges. I was having an affair with the President's daughter, and I wanted out without hurting her feelings or, frankly, my career. So I had my paper re-assign me to our bureau in Budapest."

Well, we all know the fate that awaits Americans who venture into Eastern Europe with a self-serving agenda, don't we? If the vampires don't get your damn Yankee ass (or cracker crack, if you're from south of the Mason/Dixon), the werewolves will. (Of course, these days you might just get kidnapped by Eli Roth and pressed into service as fodder for moronic torture porn, but I digress.) Soon after getting chomped by a lycanthrope on a suspiciously foggy soundstage – sorry, I mean, "deep in gypsy territory" – Jack gets transferred back to DC as the Commander in Chief's personal press agent. A full moon rises, mutilated corpses pile up and things get, well... hairy.

Werewolf was written and directed by Milton Ginsberg, a veteran TV editor whose wit and years of experience help this über-cheapie rise miles above its oft-primitive production values. Stockwell and the largely unknown cast maximize the laughs by playing it completely straight, usually the best approach in a satire and an especially sound choice in this case. And while the satire in question is political, the film's stance is steadfastly non-partisan – the target here is the everyday chicanery of politics, rather than any left or right-wing ideology.

At no point is there any indication of the characters' party affiliation; some make suspiciously Republican-sounding references to "bleeding hearts" and "hippies," but that's counterbalanced when the President himself (Biff McGuire) decries "the lunatic right." And despite the film's unmistakable Watergate-era cynicism and many painfully apt Nixon quotes sprinkled throughout the script, the President bears no resemblance to Tricky Dick, in fact, this bland lunkhead seems to eerily foretell the not-so-distant presidency of a certain former B-movie actor.

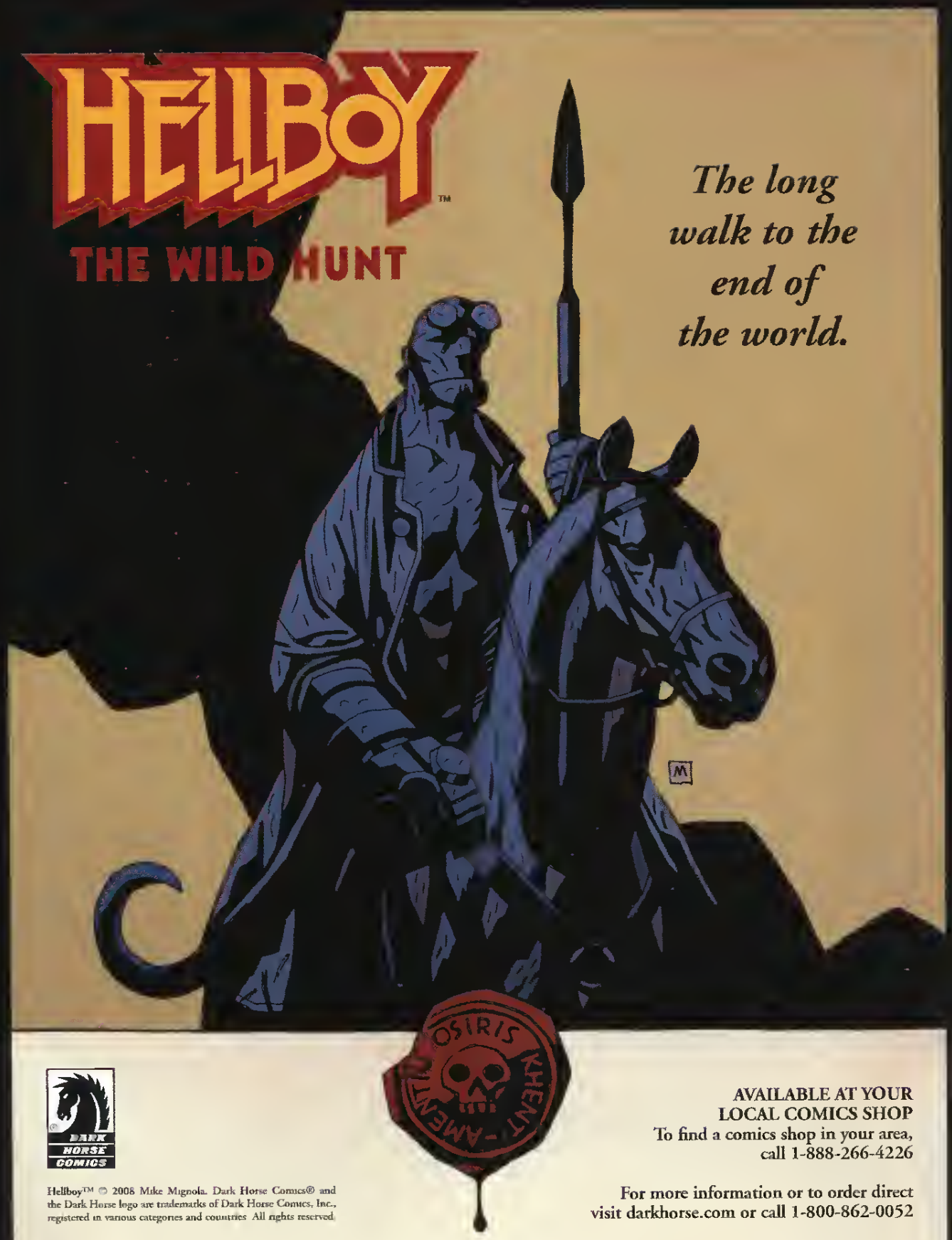
Furthermore, I swear, should I ever have the good fortune to meet Ginsberg, my first question will undoubtedly be, "What the fuck is up with you and bathrooms?" Upwards of six pivotal scenes in this film play out in bathrooms, including one point-of-view shot from inside a toilet bowl! Is this Ginsberg's condemnation of American politics as a shitty business? I believe so. Well, I hope so, 'cause if not, it's just creepy.

This much is certain: his depiction of the White House's reaction to something as outrageous and potentially scandalous as lycanthropy – initial disbelief, and then, when the obvious can no longer be ignored, official denial by any means necessary – strikes a nerve dead-on. In fact, Stockwell's initial confession – "Mr. President, I think I'm a werewolf" – falls on deaf ears while the prez is engrossed in a football game on TV.

Given his relatively low profile in recent years, it's easy to forget what a remarkable actor Stockwell is. As the Ugly American goes, the archetype doesn't get much uglier than spoiled, arrogant Jack and yet, true to the classic werewolf, he steadily becomes more human as he attains beasthood. ("Go away now-wooooo!" our tragic hero warns his girlfriend after locking himself in – you guessed it – yet another bathroom.)

Canadians remain as prone as ever to hypocritical, self-indulgent America-bashing, but I promise you that's not the case here – I'm just flyin' the flag for a lost gem. Trust me, neighbours, there's plenty to hate in Canadian politics, too; in fact, if there's any justice, I'll one day find myself reviewing a film called Ineffectual, Arrogant, Apathetic, Corrupt Media Whore-Wolf of Ottawa. In the meantime, I urge you to hunt down this too-rare flick Leonard Maltin calls a "juvenile attempt to mix Watergate horrors with the more traditional kind. For the curious only." Well, what are we if not curious? And what is Leonard Maltin if not a sad git? Now get the hell out of my basement – and don't forget to vote.

MIKE MIGNOLA and DUNCAN FEGREDO reunite with the follow-up to *Darkness Calls*!



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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

COMIC REVIEWS BY
PEDRO CABEZUELO

So here I am, writing my first column for *Rue Morgue* in over seven years, and it's turning out to be quite the trip down memory lane. When the magazine launched in 1997, I was fortunate enough to be the lead writer of Blood in Four Colours, a task I relished for more than three years before personal commitments yanked me away. And now, having quietly disposed of Gary Butler after an impromptu lunch, I'm back and ready to take a bite out of the current comic crop. First though, all this nostalgia has given me reason to pause for a second and reflect on how comics formed an integral part of my horror education.

As a child growing up in the 1970s, my exposure to the horror genre was limited, to say the least. A Restricted rating in Ontario meant that even with the aid of an adult there was no way I was entering the cinema to see *Halloween*. As for television, in those barren days before home video or pay channels, the scariest thing I was likely to see was *Goober and the Ghost Chasers*. Sure, I'd occasionally stumble upon a horror flick on the tube, but these were heavily edited and, at any rate, on way past my bedtime.

No, my earliest horror memories sprang from the local 7-11 comic book spinner rack. Here was a world that any six-year-old could easily enter. After all, most parents equated comic books with superheroes and fuzzy animals, not grisly tales of the macabre. And unlike movie ushers, the counter clerk couldn't care less if you were spending your 35 cents on *Archie's Pals and Gals* or *The Tomb of Dracula*.



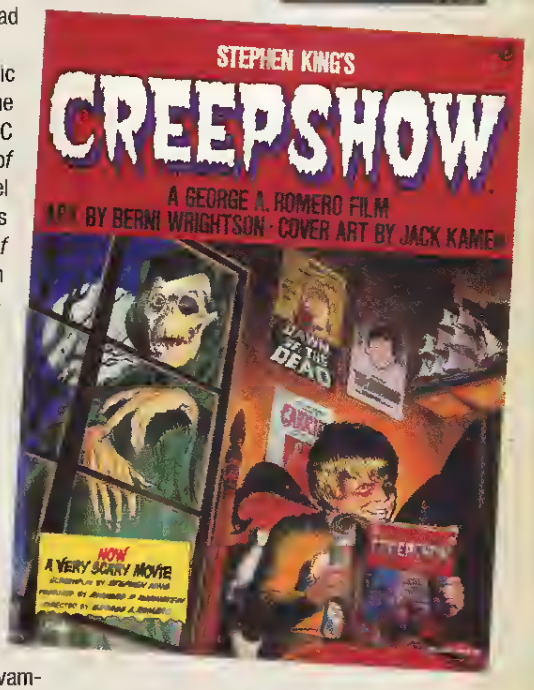
Timing, as they say, is everything, and it was fortunate that my discovery of horror comics coincided with their long-awaited rebirth. After the scandal caused by Dr. Fredric Wertham's damning essay "Seduction of the Innocent" and the creation of the Comics Code Authority in the mid-1950s, horror comics vanished off newsstands. Gone were vampires, werewolves and ghouls, replaced with giant mutant monsters and laboratory experiments gone wrong. While not without merit, lovers of traditional, gothic horror had little to sink their teeth into.

However, by the late 1960s, many comic creators began to challenge the CCA and the organization slowly loosed its grip. DC Comic's *House of Mystery* and *House of Secrets* returned to tales of terror. Marvel Comics released a slew of classic titles including *Werewolf by Night*, *Monster of Frankenstein* and *The Tomb of Dracula*. Even superheroes jumped on the horror bandwagon – it wasn't unusual to see Spiderman or Batman battling the creatures of the night. All these tales may be rather tame by today's standards, but for the starving readers of the time, they were veritable gorefests.

And that's where I come in. Already feasting on a steady diet of superhero adventures, horror comics were synonymous with forbidden pleasures. If my parents knew what I was reading they undoubtedly would have ripped the pages from my little fingers. Premature burials, vampirism, murders most foul, dismemberment – my childhood was filled with vivid four-colour imagery that still haunts me.

I'll never forget *Swamp Thing*'s train battle with a band of punk vampires (to this day punk rockers terrify me more than the undead), Batman's near-death struggle with a giant plant monster, a *House of Mystery* story where an elderly miser is buried alive, and anything drawn by Gene Colan (*Iron Man*, *Daredevil*). To my impressionable mind, these images were more potent than anything *The Exorcist* could throw up.

My true defining moment, however, came in 1982 when I stumbled upon a copy of the *Creepshow* comic adaptation at a used bookstore. At eleven-years-old there was no way I was going to see George A. Romero's latest film – itself a loving homage to the classic EC comics. The printed version, however, was within my grasp, and for a mere dollar!



I bought that comic. And, like the young boy on the cover, I devoured it. From that day on I was a bona fide card-carrying horror fan. More explicit – and more twisted – than anything I had read to date, the stories buried themselves into my subconscious to such an extent that when I finally saw the movie many years later, it couldn't help but disappoint.

My teenage years coincided with a veritable horror comic renaissance, thanks to the likes of Alan Moore, and the growth of the indie comics scene. More flesh, more blood and a lot more choice helped to satiate my appetite. Comics in general became more respected and even critically acclaimed. And yet, for me, it was never quite the same.

Perhaps it's the power of childhood memories. In today's world of movies-on-demand and video games, comics may seem a bit archaic to most children. Yet, I'd like to think that somewhere out there, there's a kid smuggling a *Friday the 13th* comic past his parents, about to experience his first, defining vision of Jason Voorhees on the printed page.

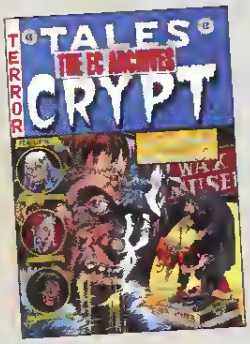
QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY PEDRO CABEZUELO AND PAUL CORUPE



Having exhausted the 19th century with his fascinating series of Victorian Murders, Rick Geary now turns his attention to some of the most puzzling crimes of the 20th century. First up: *A Treasury of 20th Century Murder: The Lindbergh Child*, about the kidnapping and murder of the Lindbergh baby. Charles Lindbergh Jr., the infant son of the famous aviator, is snatched one evening in March 1932. After a month of ransom demands and botched recovery attempts, the baby's corpse is found. Suspects are rounded up, red herrings are plenty and a man who claims to be innocent is ultimately tried, convicted and executed. The comic book format lends itself to the true crime genre beautifully, making it easy to digest the many facts and characters involved, as well as the number of theories that inevitably emerge. Geary presents the facts meticulously and without embellishment or editorial input, allowing the reader to come to his\her own conclusion. That may sound a bit dry, but Geary's art perfectly complements the narrative – it's never boring. Crisp and uncluttered, his style makes it easy for the reader to quickly identify who's who and what happened when. A great start to what promises to be another excellent series. **PCa**

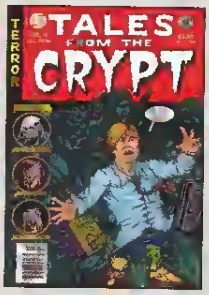
Gemstone continues its bloody, recoloured hardbound reprints of EC Comics' most gruesome title with the third volume of *Tales From the Crypt*. Reprinting issues 13 to 18, this collection features the sinister stable of EC artists at the top of their game, dealing out grisly fates to villainous characters. Although EC's "new trend" titles were known for sharply penned stories followed by shock twist endings, as *Tales From the Crypt* went on, the artists were allowed to indulge their gorehound instincts. Butchers are popular targets, as both "Grounds... for Horror" and "'t Ain't the Meat... It's the Humanity!" have evil grocers meet their deaths at the hands of their own dangerous instruments. Other memorable stories include "Buried Treasure," a period tale in which mutinous peasants slice open a rich landowner to steal his swallowed jewelry, and "Kamen's Kalamity," which takes place in the EC offices, as artist Jack Kamen comes down with a nasty case of lycanthropy. Extras include an introduction by comic appraisal guru Robert M. Overstreet, a three-part feature on the evolution of *Tales From the Crypt*, and photos of official EC fan club merchandise. **PC**



***The Hole* is an ambitious** graphic novel that attempts to dispel the popular perceptions of the Voodoo religion while satirizing capitalism, consumerism, racial tensions, black (and white) stereotypes, superheroes and mass media. The plot revolves around Carla Bonte, a middle-aged woman who has created a multimedia empire based on the concept of "hyper voodoo." However, it appears that Carla is just a pawn of Papa Legba, a multi-faceted Voodoo spirit and trickster who has his own agenda. Though that is a rather gross simplification of a complex story filled with many characters and situations that neatly come together. From the first page, it's obvious that *The Hole* is a labour of love for Damian Duffy and John Jennings, and that they are trying to create something of value, not just disposable entertainment. To their credit, they mostly succeed. What could have been an indecipherable mess is surprisingly easy to follow, thought-provoking and imbued with a strong sense of humour that makes the material fun to read. However, those unfamiliar with Voodoo (like most North Americans, I suspect), may have a hard time getting their heads around the characters and concepts. Duffy and Jennings try their best to initiate readers – using essays, notes and a glossary – but most of the material remains complex and hard to understand. A brief history of the religion and Papa Legba in comic form would have helped immensely. **PCa**



Fans of the classic *Crypt* stories will enjoy these brand new tales done in the traditional *Crypt* style. Highlighting this fourth volume are two stories by acclaimed horror writers Joe and John Lansdale. "Moonlight Sonata," drawn by Chris Roath, is a light-hearted yarn about a mugger who gets more than he bargained for, while "A Ripping Good Time," illustrated by James Romberger, features a new take on the ever popular Jack the Ripper. Five other tales round out the issue, the most effective being "Roses Bedight" by Stefan Petrucha and Jeziel Sanchez Martinez, which forgoes the traditional twist ending to create a genuinely creepy story about a man and his underage clone. **PCa**







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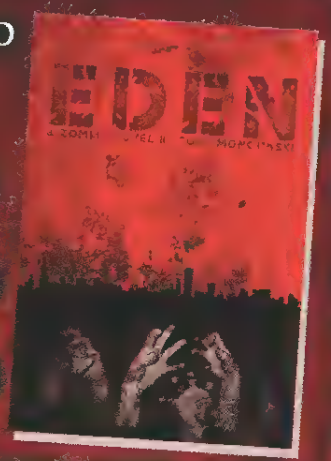
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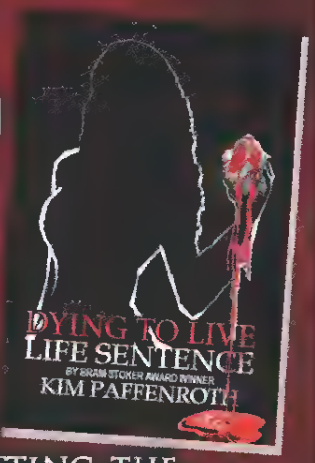
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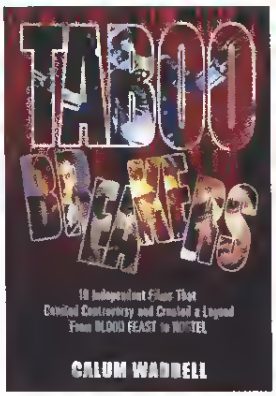


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Taboo or Not Taboo • Incomplete J-Horror History • Netherworldly Niagara



Taboo Breakers
Calum Waddell
Telos

Frankenstein, *Psycho*, *Peeping Tom*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *The Graduate*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Straw Dogs*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Exorcist*, *Last Tango in Paris*, *Taxi Driver*, *Pink Flamingos*, *Pretty Baby*, *Blue Velvet*, *Romper Stomper*, *American Psycho* and *Boys Don't Cry* all have two things in common: they all broke taboos, and they've all been excluded from a book called *Taboo Breakers*. Granted, prolific genre scribe Calum Waddell states in his introduction that the availability of interview subjects was a deciding factor in which films made the final cut, but this criteria has resulted in many sins of both omission and inclusion.

It's hardly surprising that twelve of the eighteen titles examined here are horror films, and one could scarcely argue with the inclusion of *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Maniac* and *The Evil Dead*, yet a number of Waddell's other genre choices make no sense whatsoever. *Halloween* certainly broke new stylistic ground, but no taboos – in fact, it was much less explicitly violent than most other noteworthy horror, sci-fi and action films of the '70s and early '80s, and its subject matter scarcely raised an eyebrow. Furthermore, after all the dire hand-wringing *House of 1000 Corpses* caused prior to its release, the most controversial thing about it was ultimately the number of horror fans it disappointed. And if torture porn was indeed taboo-breaking, then why *Hostel* instead of *Saw*, which not only came first but was also vastly superior? Interestingly, it's the non-horror titles examined here – *Behind the Green Door*, *Coffy*, *Fritz the Cat*, *Candy Tangerine Man* and *The Plague Dogs* – that are the uniformly sound choices, and Waddell's critiques and examinations of their legacies are well realized.

The Knee-Jerk Mafia may still get their tighty-whities in a knot from time to time over onscreen violence, but other topics, including homosexuality and the lampooning of Middle American values, for example, continue to cause infinitely greater uproar. *Brokeback Mountain*, *Team America: World Police* and *Borat*, none of which are covered here, each generated more pulpit-pounding than all of the horror films and action thrillers released since the turn of the millennium combined. With this in mind, Waddell's book is an entertaining read, but one can't help but wish that he'd cast his net wider.

John W. Bowen



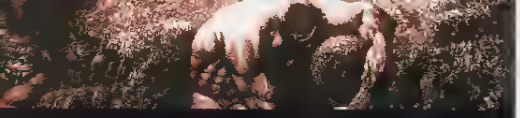
Flowers from Hell: The Modern Japanese Horror Film
Jim Harper
Noir Publishing

Finding focus can be a bitch, especially if you're writing a cultural studies book, particularly on the vast topic of cinema. Just take a look at *Flowers From Hell*, even if you narrow it down to the works of a certain country (Japan), a genre (horror) and a time period (the last 25 years), you're still left with a pretty big playing field.

To organize what the back cover boasts "is the most in-depth look at the vibrant and challenging world of modern Japanese horror so far," author Jim Harper divides his material into categories that include "Vengeful Spirits," "Demons, Monsters and the Living Dead" and "Psychos and Serial Killers," as well as ones covering influential directors Hideo Nakata (*Ringu*) and Takashi Shimizu (*Ju-on*), and – wisely – manga artist Junji Ito, whose tales have been translated into some of the country's most potent cinematic nightmares, namely *Uzumaki* and the prolific *Tomie* series. The absence of a chapter on Takashi Miike – the madman behind *Ichi the Killer*, *Audition*, *One Missed Call* and *Imprint* – is an oversight, however.

Of course, when mounting such a genre survey, one must decide not just who and what to cover but *how* to cover the material. Harper's approach mixes history, encyclopedic facts and personal opinion – sometimes awkwardly. He knows his stuff but offers unnecessary asides and occasionally repeats himself when chapter topics overlap. As well, the book often feels too much like a series of reviews that are only useful if you trust the author's opinion (*Death Note* better than *Marebito*? Er, no...), but aren't tied





The Grim Reader

TOLERANCE: THE ART OF CHRIS MARS

Chris Mars
Last Gasp/La Luz de Jesus



If you don't already love Chris Mars' nightmarish visages of grotesquely distorted figures populating impossible landscapes, this book will convert you. The paintings are frequently accompanied by text that reveals a touch of the (typically) socially conscious meaning behind his work, which is often inspired by his brother's struggle with schizophrenia. Decadently disturbing.

Jovanka Vuckovic

THE SHOW THAT SMELLS

Derek McCormack
ECW Press



Absolutely drenched in perfume, puns and plasma, *The Show That Smells* is the delightfully twisted tale of a dying country music singer and his very desperate wife, who sells her soul to a sexy, fashion-designing vampiress. McCormack delivers a quick atypical read that'll have you reeling with laughter and gasping with horror at the same time.

Last Chance Lance

ORGY OF SOULS

Wrath James White and Maurice Broaddus
Apex Publications



Like a twisted Gemini, two brothers – Samuel, a dying priest, and Samson, a superficial party boy – are seeking salvation. Samuel is hoping to live out his last days in service to God, while Samson collects souls to save him in an unearthly exchange. Featuring bloody, sexually charged violence that'll give *American Psycho* a run for its money, this novella just might grope you into believing.

Trevor Tuminski



Flowers From Hell: ***Ju-on*** *and other ghost stories are featured prominently in this uneven look at J-horror*

firmly into the context of modern Japanese horror cinema. Harper does this sometimes, noting that Sion Sono's *Strange Circus* is basically an update of the Edogawa Rampo tradition of Ero-Gro, for example, but it's not enough to satisfy.

Not helping matters is the sloppy layout (poor design despite some fantastic full-colour pics) and sloppier editing that allows for spelling errors and poor comma usage, y'know.

Flowers From Hell is an informative intro for the Japanese horror neophyte but if this is "the most in-depth look" at the country's impressive modern genre output, then I'll be a geisha's uncle.

Dave Alexander

spirits and death in niagara

Marcy Italiano
Schiffer

The violent waters of Niagara Falls reflect the tumultuous history of Southern Ontario in Marcy Italiano's *Spirits and Death in Niagara*. Tales of human sacrifice, war and, of course, feats of daredevilry make up only a small selection of this comprehensive guide to the supernatural and macabre in the border towns of Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake – the most haunted towns per capita in Canada, apparently.

The book is organized into two sections: the first is called "Spirits" and deals with supernatural shenanigans in the region, the second is called "Death" and covers a selection of gruesome ways in which people have gone to their graves in and around The Falls. The first section is definitely the weaker, since, like so many spotters' guides to local ghosts, it's suffering from a fundamental identity crisis: It can't seem to decide if it wants to be a guidebook, a debunking of superstition or a repository of ripping good fireside yarns. That said, Italiano is a competent writer and the section called "Death" is much snappier, partly because it omits the personal vignettes that slow down the first part (the instance in which she details her embarrassment at finding she's left her cellphone on during a ghost tour is a case in point, since it leaves you wondering why she's allowed the bloody phone to interrupt a second time). But here again, she has a tendency to go off on strange tangents; there are a couple of pages in which Italiano muses on the nature of suicide that seem out of place with the general tone of the book – and the cut-out-and-keep page on finding help for the suicidal is perhaps a little superfluous in this context.



EIGHTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER IT FIRST HIT NEWSSTANDS, WEIRD TALES MAGAZINE HAS REINVENTED ITSELF FOR A NEW GENERATION OF GENRE READERS.



KEEPING IT WEIRD

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

One wonders if when pulp magazine *Weird Tales* was first published in March of 1923 its creators had any inkling of its longevity – that 85 years later readers would still be clamouring for strange stories? Perhaps more importantly, just what is a "weird tale" anyway?

"I see it like this," says *Weird Tales* current editorial director Stephen H Segal. "A great science fiction or epic fantasy story makes you yell 'Wow!' A great horror movie makes you either shriek or go 'Ewwww!' But a great weird tale should leave you with your jaw hanging open, speechless, because you've never seen anything like that before."



The Stone and Bone Boy' illustration by Sam Helmer, courtesy of *Weird Tales*

During its original 279-issue run from 1923 to September 1954, the magazine focused primarily on fiction. While it was never particularly profitable, it was vitally important to horror history, its reputation firmly cemented by the pedigree of the authors whose careers it helped launch, including H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert Bloch, Robert E. Howard, Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber and Thomas Sturgeon, to name a few.

In the following years, *Weird Tales* changed hands several times. It was briefly resurrected in the 1970s, then again as a series of paperback anthologies in the early '80s, before surfacing once more in 1988. Although this incarnation was the most successful since the original, the publication would be sold twice more before being purchased in 2005 by current owners Wildside Press, whose president, John Gregory Betancourt, was pivotal in its late-'80s revival. Segal, a journalist and lifelong fan of bizarre fantasy and strange storytelling, would come on board in 2006 after meeting Betancourt at BookExpo America.

By this point *Weird Tales*' publishing schedule had been reduced to bi-monthly and the magazine's new creative team was forced to confront the fact that subscriber numbers had plummeted. It became obvious to everyone involved that something had to be done to revitalize the publication.

"We decided it was time to go back to first principles and ask, 'What is *Weird Tales*?'" Segal explains. "What exactly made it so special in the first place? Given the vastly changed media landscape, can such a magazine have the same impact on audiences in 2008 that it did on readers the better part of a century ago? And we realized that the *Weird Tales* concept is actually *more* relevant today than it has been in decades. Because today fantasy and horror and science fiction are all blurring together and collapsing back into one big bubbling cauldron of weirdness again. The new classics are films like *Pan's Labyrinth*, *Donnie Darko*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, [and works by] authors like Neil Gaiman, Kelly Link, China Miéville."

With this realization, the current *Weird Tales* editorial team adopted a very similar vision to that of the magazine's founders. They would once again focus on publishing "uniquely mind-blowing stories" that other magazines wouldn't know how to handle.

"[Fiction editor] Ann VanderMeer's looking for stories that truly explore the limits of the imagination and push the boundaries of great writing," says Segal. "That can mean anything from a haunted-house story that's narrated in the first person *by* the house to a phantasmagorical otherworld where a doubting priest is tormented by the tarot cards of a hermaphrodite pirate. . ."

Along with the renewed focus on exposing new authors, they've also added a variety of non-fiction. Here, readers can find strange first-person experiences, bizarre comic-art hybrids and cross-platform, multimedia extravaganzas such as "The 85 Weirdest Storytellers of the Past 85 Years" anniversary feature, which also had online and live event elements (including a panel discussion at last April's New York Comic-Con). The magazine's look was also given a dramatic overhaul to capture the imagination of today's readers. Segal describes the new interior layout as "steampulp" ("an unholy mixture of gothic typography and modern magazine layout"). They even re-envisioned the famous logo.

"Since the magazine's '80s revival, the design focus had been all about trumpeting the old-fashioned *Weird Tales* logo, which was created in the 1930s," says Segal. "But when we really looked hard at the greatest, most classic of the old covers, we realized that the logo wasn't what made them great, it was the unearthly beauty and power of artist Margaret Brundage's vibrant, sensual compositions, paired with memorable, outlandish headlines."

Regardless of whether fans embrace the new look or not, it seems *Weird Tales* is back, along with that brilliantly unnerving brand of fiction that formed its legacy oh so long ago.



the ghost quartet

Marvin Kaye, ed.
TOR



As countless movies, novels and stories have proven, a skilled artist can take the most mundane object or activity and make it as deliriously scary as a graveyard on a rainy night or a disembodied whisper in an abandoned house. In J-horror, cellphones and computer screens become the agents of suicide-inspiring evil; in the novels of Stephen King, nothing is more dangerous than a Sunday drive in a classic American car. The contributors to *The Ghost Quartet*, an anthology of four new novellas edited by Marvin Kaye, prove that the most basic of human activities – talking – can draw a reader into a maze of mystery and horror. They also prove, in varying degrees, the old adage that you can have too much of a good thing.

There's a lot of talking in these stories – scenes of people talking in pubs, talking on moors, whispering on castle battlements, exchanging stories in attics. This is especially true in Kaye's contribution, "The Haunted Single Malt," which introduces readers to The Jamesians, an informal group of friends who meet once a month to exchange ghost stories in an Edinburgh pub. Most of the tale is comprised of witty banter and the aforementioned story-telling, so much so that the actual ghostly happenings don't occur until the final section. Orson Scott Card's "Hamlet's Father" gives readers a talky prose version of the Hamlet story, with literature's most famous ghost putting in a single appearance, while Brian Lumley's "A Place of Wailing," the scarcest of the four novellas, gives away too many of its mysteries through passages of expository dialogue. Only Tanith Lee's dark baroque fantasy, "The Ghost Quartet," relies on action and mood to deliver the goods.

Though the writing is first-rate throughout – witty, evocative, nuanced – many readers will probably find themselves aching for more action, drama and BOO! moments. However, if read as an updating of the classic – and yes, chatty – ghost story traditions of the Victorian era and the work of M.R. James, *The Ghost Quartet* will more than fulfill its promise.

James Grainger

Italiano's tendency to editorialize means that, overall, *Spirits and Death in Niagara* reads more like a blog than a book (it even contains a large number of lengthy URLs for further reading), but it has one distinct advantage over the former: it's more portable. If you're in the region, it's worth taking along; for all its faults, it's still a comprehensive and entertaining guide to Niagara's murky and often violent past.

Justine Warwick

shock festival

Stephen Romano
IDW

While the term "mockumentary" practically wrote itself, it's going to take a clever writer to coin a word to describe Stephen Romano's fictional alternate history of exploitation films, which the author puts out as "the amazing true story behind-the-scenes on 101 of the strangest, sleaziest, most outrageous movies you've never seen."

Romano, an acclaimed artist and writer whose credentials include the screenplay for Don Coscarelli's *Masters of Horror* episode "Incident On and Off a Mountain Road," has created a vivid universe filled with films you'd love to see and personalities you'd line up at a convention to meet. The book is written as a retrospective of exploitation films and all the drug use, debauchery and cutthroat criminality behind them. For historical perspective, names such as Samuel Z. Arkoff and Roger Corman and institutions including American International Pictures occasionally pop up.

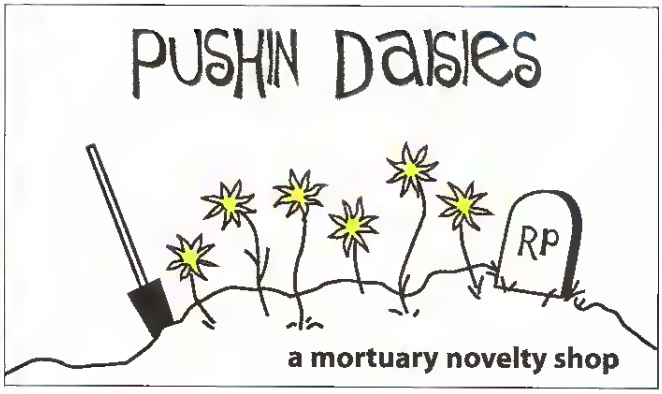


To further blur the lines between fact and fiction, Romano incorporates well-known anecdotes and personality attributes into his characters, which at points seem like thinly veiled composites of real genre figures sure to send astute fans into tizzies of speculation. For example, there is fictional Australian filmmaker Darby Silver, director of Dead Bugs on the Carpet. The plot of Dead Bugs includes a female investigator who has a recurring nightmare of four flies swimming in a pool of blood that contains a clue to the identity of a killer who communicates with her through cryptic letters. Another character says of Silver, "Whenever the killer appeared in the shadows, it was always him. He was always the disembodied hand holding the knife or strangling the girl or whatever." Silver is said to have dismembered his actress muse, slipped in her blood and died as a result of the ensuing skull fracture. Could this be Dario Argento?! Unless he takes an axe to Daria Nicolodi, we'll never know for sure.

The book is lavishly illustrated with a plethora of eye-popping posters, lobby cards, on-set stills and ad mats for such fabricated films as The Undertaker and His Wife and Starfire Beyond the Galaxy. Look closely at some of them, you might recognize Ashley Laurence or Thomas Jane, who may appear in a possible film version. Fans swept up in the recent wave of grindhouse nostalgia *need* to buy this book. 'Nuff said.

The Gore-Met

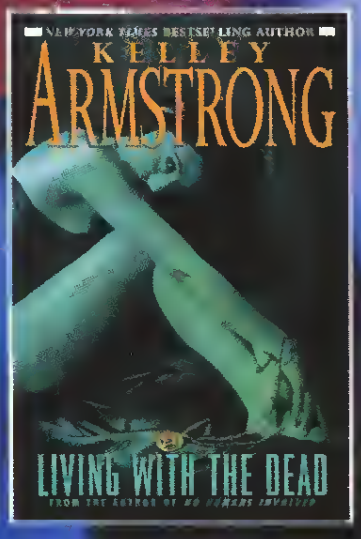




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TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

MONROEVILLE MALL
Monroeville, Pennsylvania
by J.W. Ocker



Long before director M. Night Shyamalan staked out his filmic claim to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Pittsburgh area at the opposite end of the state was firmly George A. Romero territory. And man, was it creepy. Clumsy teenagers with vampire complexes, homicide-inducing biological weapons with stripper code names, quadriplegic-torturing experimental monkeys and, of course, carnivorous reanimated corpses all peopled the place that Romero called both home and filming location. In the midst of all that world-gone-madness, one of the more dominant features of Romero's Pennsylvania landscape: The Monroeville Mall.

The iconic horror movie location is a two-storey indoor shopping centre located in the town of Monroeville, just east of Pittsburgh on Rt. 22 (Exit 57 off the Pennsylvania Turnpike). It was built in 1969, and a decade later Romero found it to be the perfect stage, centrepiece, backdrop and metaphor for his zombie film *Dawn of the Dead*, the sequel to his prototypal *Night of the Living Dead*.

Having survived Romero's garage-floor-coloured zombies, the mallrats of the 1980s and '90s, and the advent of online shopping, the Monroeville Mall has been renovated to the point of being unrecognizable from the version that was immortalized on '70s-era Technicolor film. Gone are many of the features that had a prominent place in the movie – the fountain, the ice rink, the clock tower – and it's a lot harder to block the doors with tractor trailers these days. However, it's still the same mall, with approximately the same basic layout, and a few landmarks from the movie even remain accessible to the public.



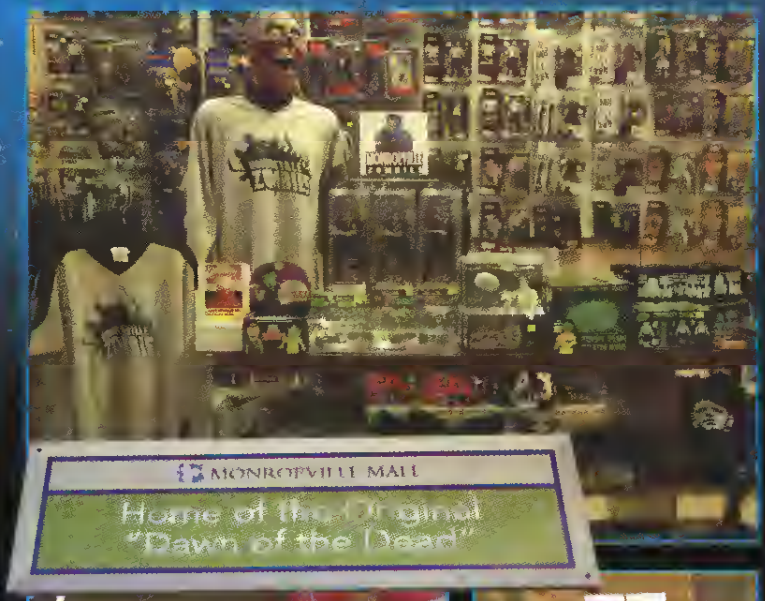
For instance, in J.C. Penney you can still ride the returbished escalator that Scott Reiniger slid down in complete Paradise-Before-The-Fall glee. In fact, J.C. Penney is one of the few original stores featured in the movie that is still a tenant (at the time of filming it was just called Penney's). It was in front of its upper-floor entrance that a fur-coated Ken Foree uttered one of the better taglines that has ever graced a movie poster: "When there's no more room in hell... ."

On the opposite side of the level and closer to what is now a Macy's, is the spot where Tom Savini performed his death scene, which in the movie ended in a fountain but in real life ended in a back injury that had him relying on a golf cart for a couple of weeks. The previously mentioned clock tower and fountain have both been replaced by children's play areas, and the ice rink, known as the Ice Palace, is now the food court, allowing you to grab a slice of Sbarro pizza at the exact location of the world's first-ever production of Zombies on Ice.

In fact, most of the mall received ample coverage throughout the movie, so anywhere you roam inside was probably featured in *Dawn* at some point. And now that technology is achieving levels of unprecedented sophistication, you can download the film to a digital video player and tour the mall with the movie itself as your guide. Leave your hatchbacks, moforcycles and wheelbarrows in the parking lot, of course.

The owners of the Monroeville Mall helped finance the film back in the day, and the mall itself is still mildly proud of its distinction. Tucked away in a little-trafficked corner of the second floor, across from the mall offices, is a wall featuring three framed black-and-white pictures of crew members, zombie actors and Romero himself. Captions under the pictures tell the story of Romero and the mall that will forever be linked to him. Above the pictures is a plaque that unequivocally states, "Monroeville Mall: Home of the Original *Dawn of the Dead*." Although having to precede a movie title with the word original is always saddening, it's gratifying to see the acknowledgement and, strangely, it somehow serves to validate the fact that you're devoted enough to the movie to visit its intrinsically mundane filming location decades later. Every once in a while, the mall also allows outside groups to host a zombie walk or *Dawn of the Dead*-themed tour.

One of the best things you can do at the Monroeville Mall, though, is to treat it like the mall it is and shop. Like most malls, it has a movie store, which often stocks *Dawn of the Dead*. That's right. You can buy the DVD in the exact place where the movie was filmed. Unfortunately, the store doesn't advertise this bit of surreality to the degree a biased horror film fan might like, but you can be happy with the fact that you can own a purchase receipt with both





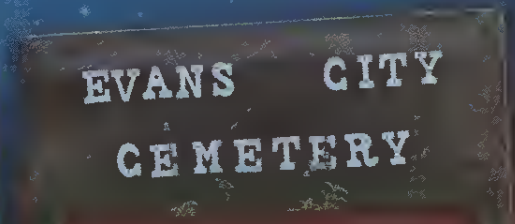


When There's No More Room In Hell: *(clockwise from top) Zombie trinkets in B.C. Sports Collectables, the infamous escalator Roger slides down, the J.C. Penney, (opposite) a photo of George A. Romero circa 1978 in a small shrine on a wall, and the mall's entrance.*

Photography by Lindsey Jennings.

the name of the mall and the movie on it. On the lower level of the building is a collectibles store that features a table display with zombie-related merchandise, including officially licensed *Dawn of the Dead* action figures and posters, as well as sports jerseys touting the "Monroeville Zombies" as the next possible expansion team for whatever professional sport would have them. Even though such enthusiastic consumerism might be missing the point of the movie in the first place, that doesn't change the fact that consumerism is comforting, whether you're holed up in an abandoned mall while hordes of the living dead meander to a Goblin soundtrack or you're just dealing with the everyday travails of modern existence.

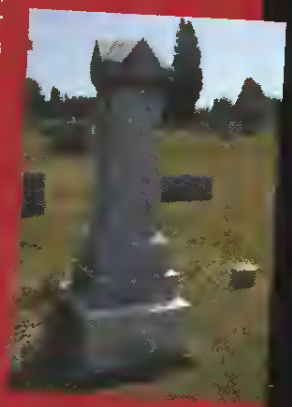
The Monroeville Mall is open Monday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 6 p.m.



ROMERO'S PITTSBURGH

While in the alternate universe of Romero's Pittsburgh, you're also going to want to check out Evans City Cemetery, the setting for the first scene in *Night of the Living Dead*. Located about half an hour north of Monroeville Mall, just outside of Evans City on Franklin Road, Evans City Cemetery is a humble graveyard that was incorporated in 1891. When you visit, keep in mind that it's sacred ground; not just because therein lies the consecrated dead but because it was here that we were first introduced to the concept of the modern zombie in the iconic movie that transitioned the horror genre into contemporary times.

Other than losing a few trees and gaining a few monuments, the cemetery has actually changed little in the 40 years since the filming of *Night of the Living Dead*. The first thing you see just inside the cemetery is the boarded-up building beside which siblings Johnny and Barbara (played by Russell Streiner and Judith O'Dea), park their car. It was in the direction of this building that Barbara runs in terror from her own first introduction to the modern zombie. It's still boarded up today, and looks satisfyingly ruined overall.



Taking a left at the building where the path forks will bring you to the adjoining Cole and Blair plots. Even though the Cole gravestone is only shown from the back, it is this grave where Barbara prays and Johnny opines about cemetery flower conspiracies. Beside this plot is the Blair tombstone, which barely made it into camera frame, but is an easier landmark to find than the small Cole headstone. Just past these plots is the pillar gravestone of Nicholas Kramer (1842-1917), anonymous in life and immortal in death, as Barbara clings to his marker as she watches the zombie kill her brother, driving gloves, Boris Karloff impressions, and all.

And if you're going to make a trilogy out of it, the retired limestone mines that served as the underground military facility in *Day of the Dead* are located in Wampum, PA, about 40 minutes northwest of Evans City Cemetery and a little over an hour from Monroeville Mall. Currently, the mines are operated as a "subsurface business complex" mostly dedicated to environmentally controlled storage. The complex is called the Gateway Commerce Center, and it is, unfortunately, generally not open to the public.



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THE GORE-MET MENU

Gore-met makes a VHS-love sandwich with the creators of *Lunchmeat*.

I started collecting videotapes in the mid-'80s. They were prohibitively expensive to purchase new – *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* retailed for $125 – so I plumbed the dusty clearance bins of once-ubiquitous mom 'n' pop video stores for cheap ex-rentals.

In the early '90s, corporate chains such as Blockbuster and Jumbo Video drove the independents out of business, to the benefit of video vultures like me who picked their inventories clean. Before DVD killed VHS, I had amassed some 800 tapes.

I'd considered it a hobby consigned to the dump bin of history until I saw the first issue of VHS fanzine *Lunchmeat*. Inside the lurid cardstock cover are 24 pages of enthusiastic reviews of films only available on VHS, such as *Demented* (1980), *Mausoleum* (1983) and *I Was a Teenage Zombie* (1987), as well as an article on monster toys, an original cartoon strip and a recipe for Peanut Butter Bacon Burgers! Giddy with nostalgia, I took the time to talk tape with *Lunchmeat* creators Josh Schafer and Ted Gilbert.

What's yours?

Josh: I'm going to have to say my Midnight Video release of *Microwave Massacre*. The artwork is fantastic and I absolutely love the Midnight Video line.

Ted: My favourite thing is finding great movies that have somehow gotten lost in the shuffle, like my tape of the animated *Halloween Tree* movie, one of the best Bradbury adaptations out there. I also love VHS [tapes] with shamelessly misleading box art, like *Slashed Dreams*.

I built my collection through old-fashioned legwork, where do you get your tapes?

Josh: Yard sales, flea markets and things akin. I used to go around to local mom 'n' pop shops and buy up all of their VHS, but most of those are long gone. I have delved into eBay over the past year or so and it's a great way to come across things that you may never have a chance to see otherwise.



When did you start collecting tapes?

Josh: I have been amassing VHS since I was a kid but started consciously collecting about five or six years ago. At first I was getting them for the awesome artwork, and it was a great way to build up my library for super-cheap, but after a while I found that there were so many terrific films that weren't even on DVD. That's when the bug really bit me.



Ted: I'm relatively new to serious collecting; for a while I would mainly just hunt down stuff that I had heard about but couldn't find on DVD. Lately though, I've gotten really into it. *Lunchmeat* provides a lot of motivation; I'm always looking for rarer movies or cooler artwork.

The tape I cherish most is a Sun Video clamshell of The People Who Own the Dark.

Ted: Flea markets are definitely the promised land for VHS collectors. Nothing makes my eyes light up like spotting a table full of old tapes just waiting to be pillaged! Of course, eBay has been an indispensable resource as well.

I still hope one day to find an intact copy of the Wizard Video Zombie release. What are your holy grails?

Josh: I would really love to get my hands (and eyes) on *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe*, and I have yet to acquire the big box version of *Lunch Meat*.

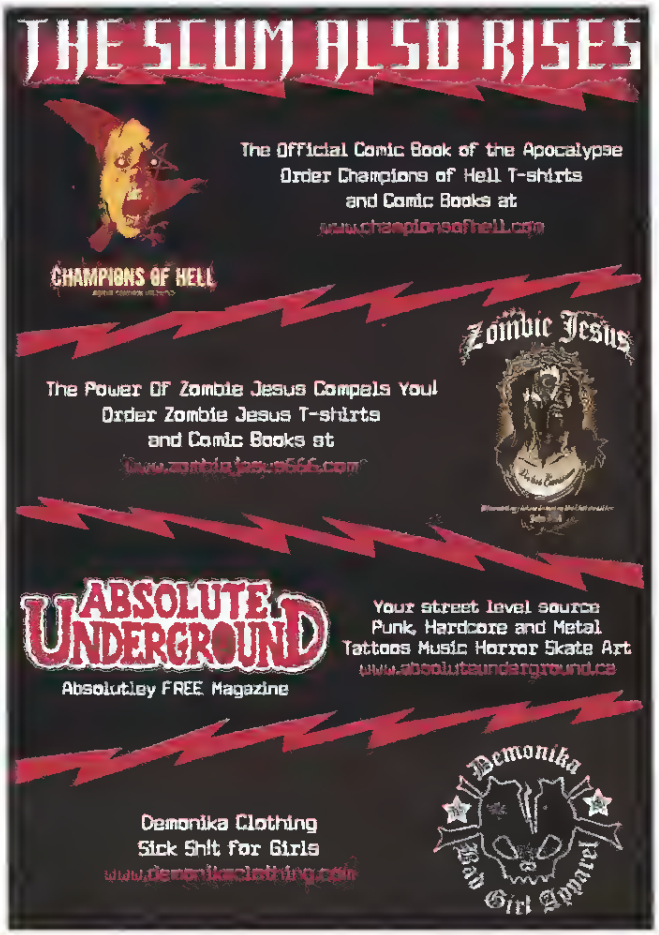
Ted: There are a few tapes I definitely need to round out my giallo collection, like *Eyeball* and *Torso*. I'd really like to find a copy of the United Video release of *The Asphyx* and the Gorgon Video release of *Bay of Blood*.

What can we expect to see in future issues of Lunchmeat?

Josh: You can certainly expect us to keep diggin' into the vast world of unseen and under-seen video releases. We also aim to bring in more articles on directors, foys, certain video lines and tons of other fun stuff. We encourage people to write in and tell us what they want to see.

Ted: We talk about new ideas for *Lunchmeat* every day from crossword puzzles to original fiction. However, the world of '80s home video will definitely remain our main focus and the bulk of the magazine until we run out of obscure '70s drive-in schlock, sleazy Eurohorror and Italian post-apocalyptic rip-offs to explore via our VCRs – and I can't see that happening too soon.

Lunchmeat is available from eBay, myspace.com/Lunchmeatzine and relapse.com. Grab one before it grabs you!


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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY KEITH CARMAN, TOMB DRAGOMIR, MARK R. HASAN, AARON VON LUPTON, TREVOR TUMINSKI AND KEVIN J. WETMORE



DEATH RACE **Soundtrack**
Paul Haslinger
INTRADA
Although Paul Haslinger's score never really evolves into anything beyond a roughhouse package of fat electric bass, thudding percussion, plenty of peripheral synth fuzz and electric guitar, it's still an alluring blend of oily attitude that transcends another utterly unnecessary genre remake. The pinched stylistic scope makes this album dramatically narrow, and the handful of dumb dialogue samples bring its flow to a screeching halt, but Haslinger does know how to stir up toughness, machismo and sadism through the use of his own patented style of rock and electronica. *Death Race* is a meaner variation on his punchy *Shoot 'Em Up* score, with Goblinesque keyboards and occasional synth strings that add gravitas to cues signalling moments of serious contemplation and mortal danger. Some funky and leaner electronica tempers the score's abrasiveness, but it's not enough to offset the mounting monotony. **MRH ☠☠1/2**



MIDNIGHT MEAT TRAIN **Soundtrack**
Robb Williamson and Johannes Kobilke
LAKESHORE RECORDS
Although Justin Lassen's song-filled soundtrack CD will probably get the lion's share of attention, the separate score release of Robb Williamson and Johannes Kobilke's original compositions is definitely worth snapping up for their seamless fusion of electronica, trance and industrial in a traditional dramatic score. Orchestral samples fuzz into industrial effects, shock cues are mercurial pools of drones and sudden tonal stabs, and there are even some lovely tender cuts that give the score a humanistic element amid all the digital carnage. A tinny, chiming Asian motif is sparingly applied to a handful of cues, and towards the album's final third there's a dramatic shift from atmospherics to bass-pulsing action, with thick brass emulations and trickling percussion textures that make this slow-building tribute to a charnel house massacre very, very sexy. **MRH ☠☠☠☠**



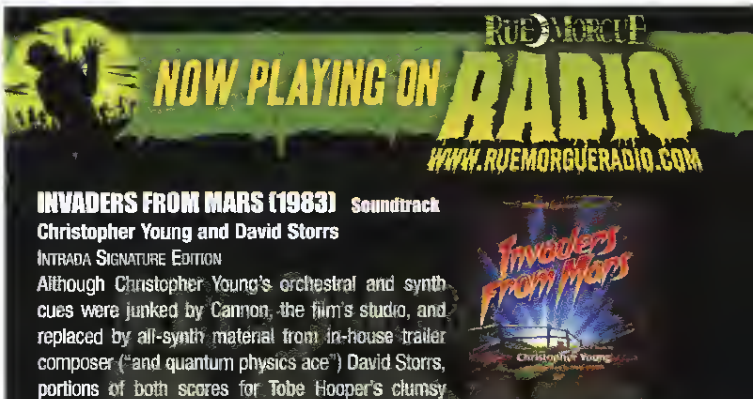
THE DEAD NEXT DOOR **Punk**
There's No Business Like Horror Business
DR. CYCLOPS
With a title like *There's No Business Like Horror Business* the writing is already on the wall for The Dead Next Door's debut effort. To no one's surprise, this horror punk band from Gothenburg, Sweden (known for its once-groundbreaking metal scene) sticks closely to the Misfits' brand of melodic punk, but brings the energy, originality and talent down a few notches. We're guessing the band members are still pretty young, partly because of the amateur songwriting and also because they've named their songs after more recent horror efforts with titles such as "Cabin Fever," "Ginger Snaps" and "Goodbye, Raccoon City" (a *Resident Evil* reference). In a DIY, first-effort kind of way, *There's No Business Like Horror Business* is respectably fun (they've even worked in the '50s doo-wop vibe quite nicely) but ultimately it's a familiar sound that too many other bands do a lot better. **AVL ☠1/2**



AMANDA PALMER **Goth**
Who Killed Amanda Palmer?
ROADRUNNER
Better known as the singer of goth cabaret duo The Dresden Dolls, Amanda Palmer takes a stab at a solo, pseudo-concept album surrounding her own fictitious death. Her sharp, choppy piano attack – befitting of the shower scene from *Psycho* – and androgynous, often breathless vocals that sweep from a mournful contralto to a frantic caterwaul have been given a cinematic polish without sacrificing raw power. Like most solo records, it's tough to gauge why this material didn't fall under the Dolls' ragged umbrella, but considering that the pure, frenzied bluster behind tracks such as "Leeds United" and "Guitar Hero" easily bests anything on their last two albums, it's evident the girl needs to be alone when she's got an axe to grind. Sick with love, she sings, "the headstone's all ready, all carved up and pretty," but it would seem Palmer really did need to die in order to feel this alive. **TT ☠☠☠☠**



THE VOODOO ORGANIST **Rock**
Darwin Dance Hall Days
INDEPENDENT
The Voodoo Organist (a.k.a. Scott Wexton) is back with thirteen more tracks featuring his trademark dark, swampy synths, deep, rolling vintage organs and junk percussion, courtesy of Robin "Graves" Kennon and his "devil drums." "Pulling out [his] heart right on the stage," Wexton's gravel-throated bark is a cross between Tom Waits and Nick Cave's possessed preaching, but it's his inappropriate tickling of the ivories that would give Deep Purple's Jon Lord a shameboner. The grungy blaze of *Darwin*



INVADERS FROM MARS (1983) **Soundtrack**
Christopher Young and David Storrs
INTRADA SIGNATURE EDITION
Although Christopher Young's orchestral and synth cues were junked by Cannon, the film's studio, and replaced by all-synth material from in-house trailer composer ("and quantum physics ace") David Storrs, portions of both scores for Tobe Hooper's clumsy *Invaders From Mars* remake were commercially released. Now, Intrada's two-disc set (limited to 200 copies) compiles newly remastered cues from three previous CD and LP configurations. Young's orchestral theme is pretty but monotonous, and the orchestral action cues blatantly mimic Jerry Goldsmith's *Rambo*, but the real treat here is Young's *Hellraiser*-like, whacked-out synth cues, which he reworked years later into an even stranger experimental suite (also included). Storrs' material isn't that different from Young's junked electronica – just limited by less sophisticated gear and a conventional approach. It forms an elaborate B-side to this multilayered musical tribute to alien infiltration in the heart of banal suburbia. **MRH ☠☠☠☠☠**

THE LA OPERA'S ADAPTATION OF CRONENBERG'S THE FLY WAS, LIKE SETH BRUNDLE, A FAILED BUT NOBLE EXPERIMENT.



It's Not Over 'Til BRUNDLEFLY Sings

by KEVIN J. WETMORE

LIKE THE EXPERIMENT AT THE HEART OF DAVID Cronenberg's 1986 *Fly* remake, the L.A. Opera's six-night production of *The Fly: The Opera* (also directed by Cronenberg) at the Dorothy Chandler Pavillion this past September was, ultimately, a failed experiment. Like Brundlefly, this project represents the melding of two not particularly compatible things, and the result was a hideous monstrosity, albeit one from which we cannot look away.

There is a lot to hate about the production for fans of the movie. The overall structure is problematic: Brundle (played by Daniel Okulitch) doesn't get into the telepod until the end of Act I, so Act II begins with him starting to become Brundlefly. As such, the expert pacing established in the film is absent. The second half leaves too little time for the pathos of the character or any sense of dread that comes as a result of Brundle's inability to reconcile his desire to achieve full transformation with regret for his lost humanity.

Howard Shore, whose score for the film is powerful, nuanced and textured, wrote one for the opera that unfortunately is neither very interesting nor memorable – although flashes of the menace of his *Fly* music do show through from time to time. The libretto by David Henry Hwang also contains some laughable lines, which doesn't help. General consensus is that neither horror fans nor opera aficionados found the experience worthy.

Having said that, the show does elicit a few gasps. There are two or three moments in the piece where the music is wonderfully ominous (always instrumental segments – the singing tends to undercut the horror) and, toward the end, the show features a chilling sequence in which The Fly crawls across the ceiling, then head-first down a beam toward the heroine (Ruxandra Donose as Veronica Quaife).

Still, the L.A. Opera should be commended for having good intentions. In a world where films such as *Legally Blonde* and *The Breakfast Club* are routinely adapted for the stage, it took a horror film seriously and retold it with respect, if not actual skill. Though this particular experiment is a failure, like Seth Brundle's, it is a noble one, worthy of further investigation. I, for one, am looking forward to Dead Ringers: The Opera or Videodrome! The Musical! ☠



Dance Hall Days' lead-off track "Dig the Hole," the plodding, haunted blues of "Crawl" and the industrial, theremin-a-go-go that is "Still Remains" find the duo at its absolute best, sounding like two ghosts that have taken over the chapel and turned it into an unhinged circus sideshow of moral depravity. Recorded in just seventeen hours, *Darwin Dance Hall Days* is the album that should bring The Voodoo Organist out of underground purgatory. **TT** ☠☠☠☠



MONDO A GO-GO — **Garage Rock**

Mondo Franco

RADIUM DIAL

A grungy, garage-rock tribute to Spanish director Jess Franco (the prolific purveyor of some 200 titillating titles such as *Vampyros Lesbos* and *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*), *Mondo Franco* attempts to capture the non-conformist approach of the director's cinematic oeuvre via an anarchic, DIY '60s punk treatment of sixteen of his (mostly unavailable) scores. With two lounge-lizardy vocalists, a tit-shakin' backbeat and probably some tambourines, Mondo a Go Go sounds like the Squirrel Nut Zippers starring in Attack of the Amazon Inmates from Planet Reverb, but the lyrics ("inspired" by Franco's films) are fairly clever. The band also thankfully mixes up the music with Franco-flavoured lounge, electronica and jazz stuffs. Good fun for Franco fanatics, but otherwise forgettable – just like his films!

TD ☠1/2



WHITE CHAPEL — **Metal**

This Is Exile

METAL BLADE

If White Chapel had existed 30 years ago, they would have been the perfect crew to score *The Exorcist*. Uniting bastardized religious imagery with descriptive tales of gruesomely obliterating deities and their fellow man, *This Is Exile* is undeniably cryptic. The band relies on detuned instruments and minor scales to create swirling dirges that bolster the thematic creepiness. Vocals range from Carcass-esque guttural growling to tormented, possessed wails, while musically they unite Gothenburg's clinical metallic sheen with Dillinger Escape Plan's frenzied guitar harmonies and modern death metal's sampled drum styling. While these diverse aspects of extreme metal would seem somewhat cacophonous when smashed together, the overall impact is impressively imposing and weighty. It's almost as if White Chapel is striving to be the chaotic, bleak nemesis to As I Lay Dying's God-fearing praise. **KC** ☠☠☠



ANIMA — **Metal**

The Daily Grind

METAL BLADE

Overall, *The Daily Grind* is rather imitative metal-inspired hardcore featuring tales of slasher-style masked murderers, flayed dead bodies and infectious diseases. However, it's surprisingly strong and extreme music from a group of guys who look too young to actually get into a scary movie without an adult in tow. Modestly technical in the vein of Bleeding Through and decidedly bottom-heavy – there's some obvious Cannibal Corpse worship – these nine tracks do not redefine horror-influenced metalcore's modus operandi. But given the impressive ability-to-age ratio of Anima, by the time they're old enough to buy a pack of smokes they should have a solid handle on twisting their juvenile/simplistic lyrics into something more than "kill, blood, (add expletive of your own choice here), kill." **KC** ☠☠☠

THINK YOU'VE HEARD IT ALL WHEN IT COMES TO HORROR MUSIC? IF SO, VERONIQUE CHEVALIER WANTS TO INTRODUCE YOU TO HER NEW ALBUM: POLKA HAUNT US.

Ghosts in the Accordion

BY LISA LADOUCEUR



According to Veronique Chevalier, in hell there's lots of beer, no last call and non-stop polka. For the French-American cabaret singer, this is not a "two outta three ain't bad" situation. Chevalier actually loves polka, that Eastern European folk music best known 'round here as the soundtrack to Oktoberfest or the occasional novelty tune from Weird Al Yankovic. Fortunately for the rest of us, Chevalier also loves scary stories. So her new record, *Polka Haunt Us*, gives the genre a Transylvania twist.

"It's a spook-tacular compilation of thirteen polkas based on ghostly legends from various regions around the world," she explains. "We've combined polka with indigenous musical forms that correspond with the tales. So for a song about Annie Palmer – the white witch of Jamaica who would seduce and kill her slaves – we've mixed polka with reggae."

Polka Haunt Us began with a desire to make an original Halloween theme album, an update of ye olde monster mashes Veronique loved as a kid. But the Hollywood-based singer (who is part Polish and grew up travelling the world with a music-loving dad in the service) was curious about Halloween-y traditions beyond her own borders. The album soon morphed into a bigger project involving dozens of guest musicians and a global search for stories that she could set to the squeezebox. Playing ethnomusicologist, she uncovered haunted accounts from Japan ("Blank Faced Goblin"), Ireland ("Castle Leap"), Norway ("Fisher Bird Girl"), North America ("Ghost Train," "Devil's Guitar") and beyond, then paired them with local music traditions. Each track has its own musical personality based on different polka-like styles, from oompa-pa to waltzes, meaning some songs sound like what you would expect, while others take off in new directions. While few will appeal to those with a true hate-on for polka, Veronique hopes fans of macabre tales or strange sounds will be intrigued enough to give it a chance.



"I realize that polka has become a caricature in music," she says. "It's the genre everybody loves to hate. But it's basically a very simple and universal rhythm. So what I like about polka is that it's very accessible. It's something everyone recognizes on some level, so I think it draws people in. I hope that by adding the spooky element we can remove some of the disdain that most people have for polka."

There are certainly plenty of campfire-worthy narratives to learn from the *Polka Haunt Us* liner notes. One of the best is "Ghost Train," a rollicking roots number (performed by Mike Surratt, a fellow accordion enthusiast) based on a Canadian legend about a fatal train wreck near Medicine Hat, Alberta in the early 1900s.

"The train is a symbol of progress, really, and I'm always attracted to train lore," explains the singer. "This particular story was compelling because it wasn't just about one ghost, it was a whole train and the occupants were all ghostly and demonic and it seemed very frightening and vivid to me."

The album closes with the bonus track "Vampire Surprise," which was a modest hit last year for Chevalier, who has also appeared on *America's Got Talent* and many cabaret, variety and comedy shows, where she is sometimes known as "Weird Val." She says she'd like to bring *Polka Haunt Us* to the stage but even if that doesn't happen, she's sure listeners haven't heard the end of her twisted take on the genre.

"I've been very excited about the overwhelming array of stories from all the different cultures. Through everything I've been able to find, it's clear everyone loves their spooky stones, whether they have Halloween or not. I thought I would never find enough good stories to do this record. But by the time we were finished I thought we'd have to do a record every year because these stones never end and there are so many great ones."

PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS PLAYABILITY SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



MONSTERPOCALYPSE

Board Game

Privateer Press

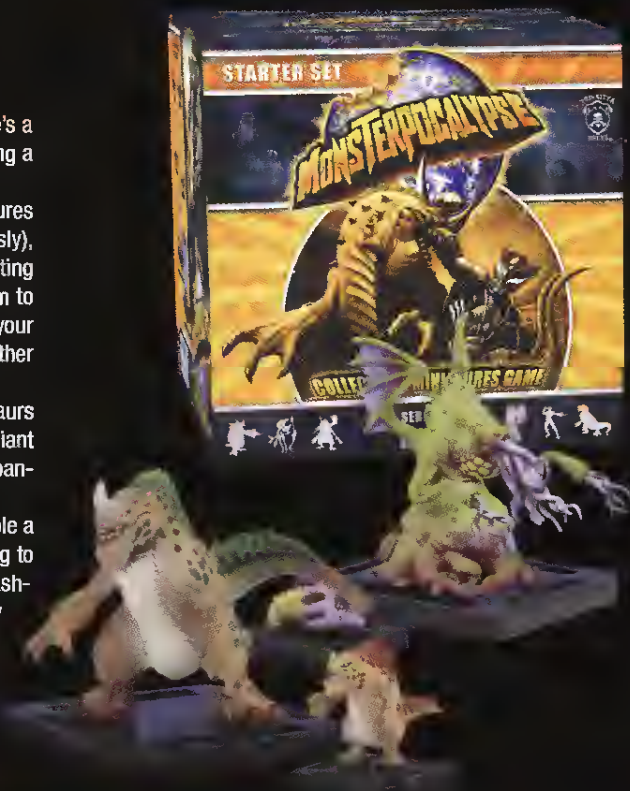
Kaiju fans, stomp your feet and smile! Finally there's a game that lets you live out your fantasies of becoming a giant monster and levelling your hometown.

Monsterpocalypse is a new collectible miniatures board game featuring malevolent monsters (obviously), rampaging robots, scary spaceships and devastating dinosaurs that you control during gameplay. Use them to execute strategic military attacks and a few of your favourite wrestling moves. Depending on which side you select, you battle to either protect or destroy the Earth.

Players choose from six different factions, including a group of friendly dinosaurs (Terrasaurs), Lovecraftian monstrosities (the Lords of Cthul), an armada of giant robots (the G.U.A.R.D.), a fleet of Martian warships or even a group of huge Japanese ninja cyborg warriors.

Utilizing wonderfully detailed, pre-painted plastic miniatures, players assemble a city, arrange their armies and then roll the dice to determine how they're going to lay the smack-down on each other with teeth, talons, lasers and good old-fashioned body slams. During battles, your monsters can earn power-ups by destroying buildings and smashing enemy units, which enables them to access special secret powers in order to dole out even more damage.

Available in starter boxes and booster packs, *Monsterpocalypse* comes with a set of rules, mapping tiles and enough monsters to level any city from Toronto to Tokyo. Battles are frantic, fast-paced and as fun to look at as they are to play – last monster standing wins.





DRACULA 3: PATH OF THE DRAGON

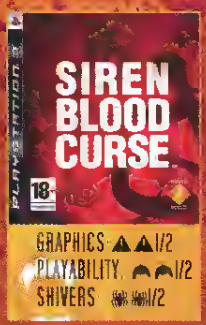
PC

Kheops Studio

It's been nearly a decade since the original title of this trilogy, *Dracula: Resurrection* (2000), and its sequel, *The Last Sanctuary* (2001), had gamers chasing The Prince of Darkness across the Carpathian mountains and the foggy streets of 19th-century London.

Path of the Dragon, an in-name-only sequel, is set just after WWI with players embarking on a mission as Father Arno Moriani, a Catholic priest sent to Transylvania to investigate the canonization of a recently deceased doctor who believed in the existence of vampires. As a religious man, you decide to debunk his theories through a serious of puzzle-solving scenarios that'll have you testing blood samples, piecing together broken artifacts and interviewing frightened Romanian villagers. Surprises await, naturally...

With animation that's sharp and meticulously detailed, top-notch voice acting and a soundtrack thick with chilling ambient noises, this horror adventure is definitely worth climbing out of your coffin for.



SIREN: BLOOD CURSE

PS3

Sony

Run for the hills – the *shibito* are back! This long-awaited follow-up to the original PS2 title now represents the next generation in video games – it's available in its entirety or in a series of twelve separate downloadable episodes.

The game follows events that occur after an American TV crew arrives at a Japanese village with a history of bizarre occult activity. While trying to avoid the undead (*shibito*) that have infected the town, players wander through photo-realistic settings – including abandoned mines and bloodsoaked hospital corridors – trying to unlock the mystery of the cursed village. Using the *Siren* series' "sight-jacking" system, players can see through the eyes of seven other characters at a time, making for a uniquely unnerving experience.

Just be warned: this is a suspenseful, stealth-oriented game where you'll spend more time avoiding fights than wielding a chainsaw. Sound good? If so, it's well worth it to heed *Siren*'s call.

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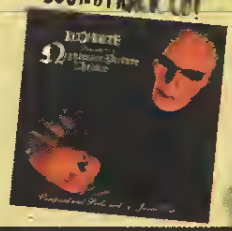




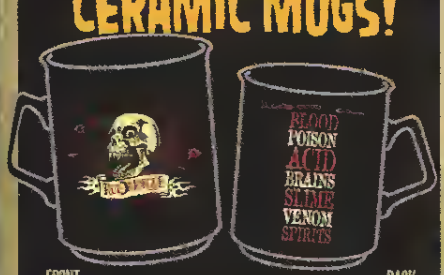
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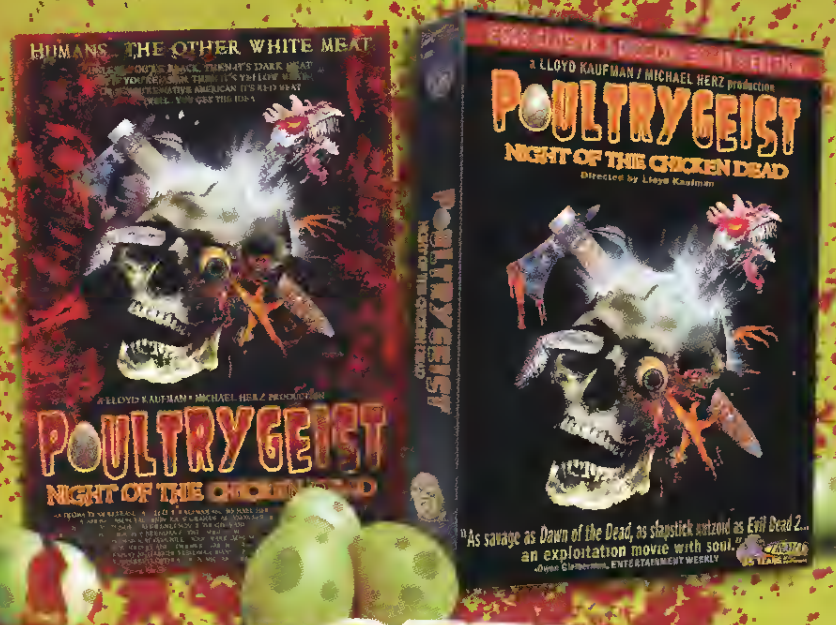
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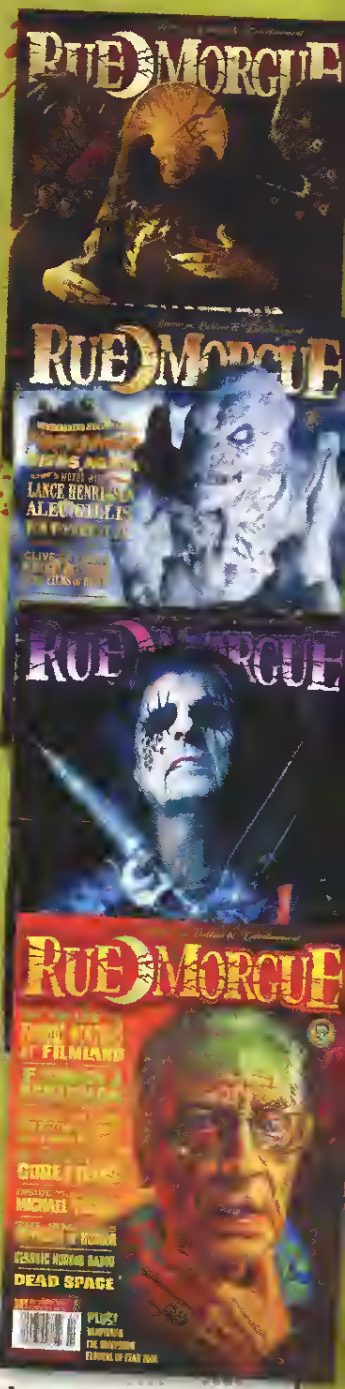
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DELL ABYSS

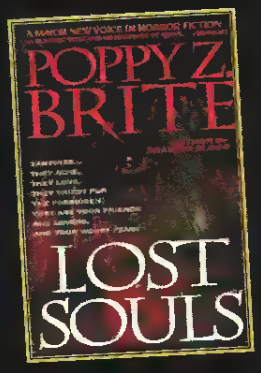


United States
1991 – 1995

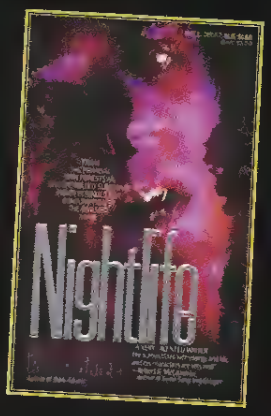
The year was 1990 and horror was dead.

Major publishing companies were cutting back their genre titles in droves due to an oversaturated market – too much horror was weighing down bookstore shelves and sales were plummeting. Yes, the crimson bubble of the '80s horror boom had finally burst.

One company, however, saw opportunity even as its competitors were sent scurrying. Though Dell's line of horror novels were also feeling the market crunch, an eagle-eyed sales representative told then editor-in-chief Leslie Schnur that, with every other publisher leaving the genre behind, there might be an opportunity for one company to persevere and revitalize popular horror literature. Schnur took this suggestion to editor Jeanne Cavelos, an avid horror fan, explaining that Dell was planning to discontinue publishing genre titles unless she came up with a new, financially viable concept. The result was Dell's horror imprint, Abyss, launched in February of 1991 with Kathe Koja's critically acclaimed novel *The Cipher*, which went on to win the Bram Stoker Award in the First Novel category.

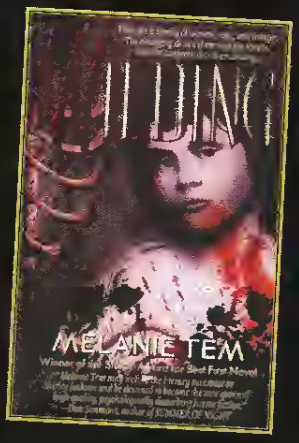


Part of the reason the Abyss line proved so popular (fan sites still fondly reminisce about the imprint today) is that it infused the genre with fresh ideas of what horror was, rather than simply retreading old ground. A conscious choice was made to publish scary stories that were set in modern times and featured regular people as protagonists. In a short foreword that appeared inside many of the covers of Abyss' books, Cavelos explained that the line's intent was to bring readers "horror unlike anything you've ever read before." No, these weren't traditional stories about haunted houses or Indian burial grounds, they were books that pushed boundaries. Cavelos called it "new horror from the dark frontier." That frontier, she continued, is where we most often find ourselves. Not surprisingly, the line found a salivating audience which had become bored with predictable terrors and was ready to whet its appetite on the Abyss approach, which promised new horror by new voices and actually delivered, helping to launch the careers of Poppy Z. Brite (*Lost Souls*), Brian Hodge (*Nightlife*) and Melanie Tem (*Prodigal*).

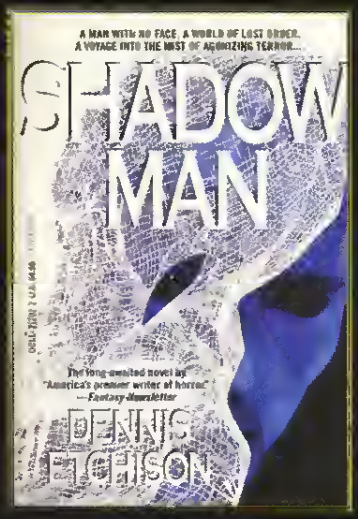


The experiment worked, and while the Abyss books were not breaking sales records, they were still selling consistently better than the mystery titles Dell was also publishing at the time. Sadly, in July of 1994 Cavelos left the company to pursue her own writing career, and responsibility for the imprint was divided among several assistant editors. The publishing schedule, which until that point had seen one new book released each month, quickly became unpredictable.

Abyss continued for just over a year after Cavelos' departure, during which time it only put out two books, then it too became a victim of the very circumstances that gave birth to it. Dell began to oversell the books to the wholesale market (grocery stores, department stores, etc.) believing horror fans didn't purchase their reading material at bookstores. Too many novels were shipped out and sales inevitably fell.



Despite its brief existence, the imprint released 50 books, many of which garnered Stoker nominations and wins, including titles by Tem, Brite, Hodge, Nancy Holder and Robert Devereaux, proving to other publishers that horror was not dead. Instead, readers of genre fiction had just become more sophisticated, and now demanded stories that mined new territory, new monsters and new fears. Following Abyss' demise, mainstream publishers slowly returned to the market. The most notable of which was Dorchester Publishing's Leisure book line, which came onto the scene at roughly the same time and helped fill the "new horror" void after Abyss folded.

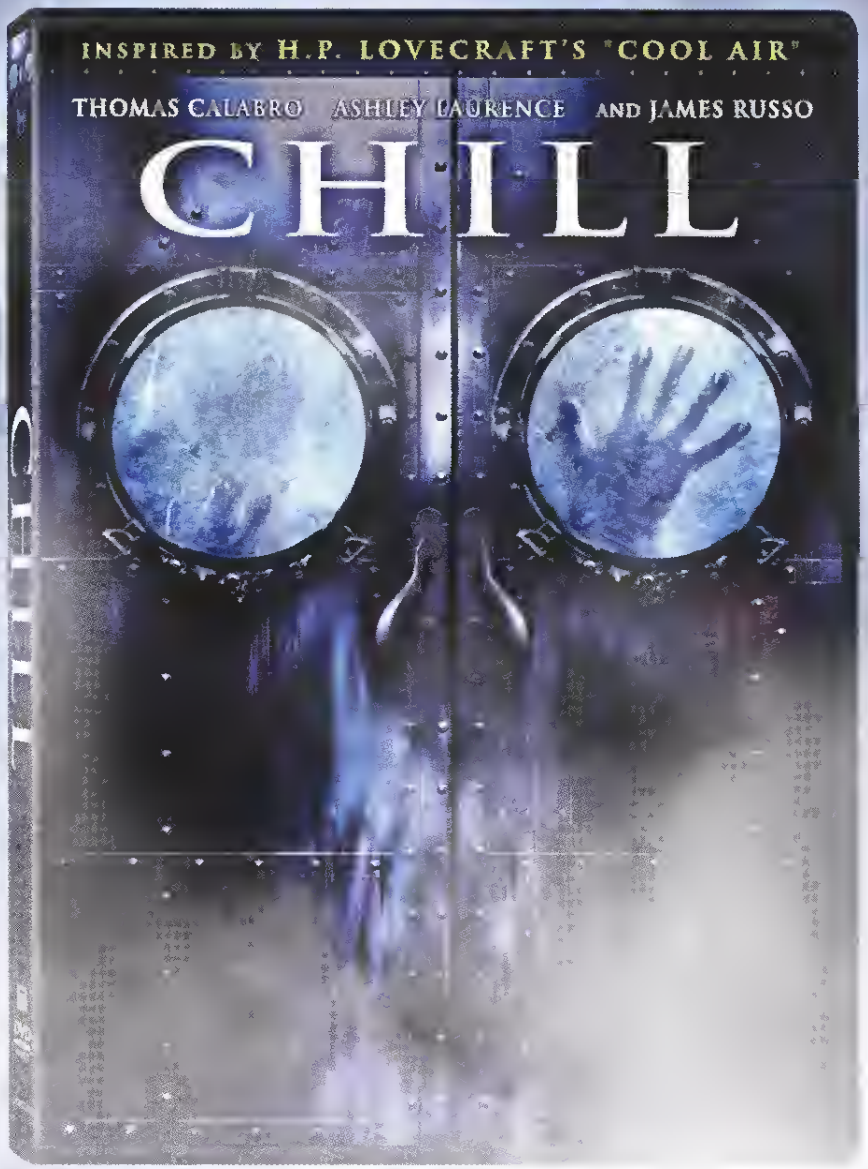


Many of the authors who carried Abyss over the market crash have continued to have success writing horror, while others have moved on to other genres. Koja now focuses almost solely on young adult fiction, while Brite has gone on to pen a series of novels concerning an eclectic group of characters who work in the New Orleans restaurant industry.

While the imprint has been defunct for nearly fifteen years, without its vision and its releases – which helped redefine horror fiction during its darkest hour – today's genre novels would likely be very different beasts indeed.

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